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DEATH

ARTHUR CRABB

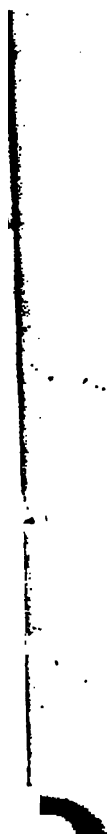












BEN THORPE

BY

ARTHUR CRABB

AUTHOR OF "SAMUEL LYLE, CRIMINOLOGIST,"
"GHOSTS," ETC.



L.C.

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BEN THORPE

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CHAPTER I

TROUBLE had been brewing anyway, but Bill Haney brought it to a head. He sat on the bank, in the sun, enjoying himself with Clinchy Smith and tossing a stone or two across the tracks into the Hudson. Bill was entirely satisfied with life on that fine June day, but he was dead against all authority and wealth on general principles, having no scrap of either himself. Accordingly when fate just then brought along the inspection locomotive, with seats and a glass enclosure over the boiler, Bill took a pot shot at it with a stone of considerable size and broke a pane of glass and struck the general manager on the arm, whereupon Bill Haney and Clinchy Smith chuckled with deep satisfaction and disappeared.

Three days later the Spuyten Duyvil yard was full of bums, a fine lot of thieves; they had come up from the city in the morning, as a matter of habit, for a day in the country, and at five or a little after were waiting for the Harlem freight to take them back. An accommodation came along and dropped eight officers on the station platform, and eight more around the bend where the freight tracks join the main line,—plenty for the work at hand, and so distributed as to prevent escape.

The alarm was given and the crowd beat it for the bridge across the creek, an apparent way out of the trap;

but that plan went a-glimmering, for the bridge draw rose upward according to previous arrangement and there they were, caught proper.

But just before the trap was sprung, an incident occurred. Between the freight track and the river was an inspector's shanty and in it at the time happened to be John Thorpe, Division Engineer, Scotch and worthy. He stood in the doorway, knowing what was coming but little interested, for he had seen such things before. One detail, however, caught his attention.

A boy, of perhaps twelve, sat on a flat-car and beside him was a cement bag, full, probably, of stolen goods. The boy was not attractive, but the bag was and one of the loafers saw it and came toward him.

"W'at yer got there, kid? Show me."

"None o' yer damn business; it's me own."

"The hell it is! Where'd yer get it?" The man was coming closer and might be expected to use force.

"Quit it, you! Leave him be!" The words came from an unexpected quarter.

"Who the hell are you?" The man snarled the question.

"I'll show you damn quick, if you don't quit the kid."

The champion of the boy was another boy, also of twelve, but larger. He had an iron bolt in his left hand for close work and a rock in the right for distant, and there was no fear in his eye. The man changed his mind, though he had to contend only with a boy. The others paid no attention, it being none of their business.

Then came the alarm and the wild rush toward the bridge across the creek.

John Thorpe had watched the big boy who had defended the smaller and had not been especially impressed with the act, but he had seen the boy's face, his bare arms and legs, his neck, and he had heard his voice. When

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the alarm came, and the attempted flight, he saw the boy stand still for a moment, planning. Thorpe paid no attention to the rest of the crowd, but kept his eyes on the boy.

The boy, his plan made, flew to a nest of piles on the bulkhead, around them, and disappeared. He appeared again behind the shanty, slid along the ground and under the shanty. The cops had not seen him; or, having seen him, had no eye for detail and forgot him, being satisfied with the fifty others they had gathered in. They started them cityward in police wagons, at hand for the purpose, and John Thorpe spoke to the boy hiding under the shanty floor.

"They've gone, son," he said. "Come out; I'll not harm you."

Perhaps it was the voice, but whatever it was the boy came out and stood before the gray-haired man, yet not before he had judged the distance between them to be safe and assured himself that no one else was about. He was confused, he did not understand what was going on. He stood with his eyes on John Thorpe, waiting to find out.

"Why are you up here with a crowd like that?" Thorpe asked. The boy made no sign that he had heard, and Thorpe laughed. "Don't say a word if you don't want to," he said. "I suppose I don't care, really, why you travel with a lot of thieves. You can go, you know, if you want to."

"A day off, and a swim," the boy said. "They ain't no friends of mine." From the dirt on the boy it was evident the swim had been taken early in the day.

"Oh, I see. Where do you live?"

The boy indicated Manhattan Island, with an inclination of his head.

"What's your name?"

"Ben."

"Ben what?"

The boy hesitated. "That's all," he said, finally.

"Who do you live with? Have you a father and a mother?"

"I had a mother."

"Is she dead?"

"Naw, she got sent to the Island."

"Humph." Thorpe, shocked, hid his amazement under that gentle exclamation.

"Where do you live now? Who do you live with?"

"I don't live with nobody." Suddenly the boy became voluble: "Me mother and grandmother was together, but me grandmother died and me mother got sent away and I'm on me own since, and glad of it; women ain't no good."

"Where's your father?"

"I never had no father. Me mother says she don't know who me father is, and don't give a damn, either. I get along all right."

"Are you telling me the truth, boy?"

"Certainly I'm tellin' yer the truth. What th'ell would I lie to yer for?"

"Where are you going now?"

The boy looked cityward and then, remembering that the only means of free transportation, the Harlem freight, was gone, he put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a few coppers. "Say, lend me——" He stopped, for no apparent cause. Thorpe took a half-dollar from his pocket and tossed it to Ben. The boy caught it and held it in his hand, turning it over and over, gazing at it. Finally he looked up.

"Thanks," he said.

Thorpe had been watching him every second. He was a most unusual boy in appearance; Thorpe was sure that

either he was no common child of the slums or the slums had brought forth a miracle. If Thorpe fascinated the boy, the boy fascinated Thorpe still more. The Scotchman's eyes half closed as he gazed at the boy twirling the half-dollar; the boy stared at him, still wondering what the game was. The blood rushed to Thorpe's face; it required all his courage to speak.

"How would you like to go home with me?" he asked.

The boy's face hardened, his lips shut tight. The man waited.

"What's the game?"

"There's no game, son. I have no children of my own, I like you; maybe we'd get along together for a bit. If you don't like it with me, you can leave."

"Where do yer live?"

"Up the road a way, in Lanville, in the country."

"Yer mean yer want me to live wid ye?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"What do I have ter do?"

"Nothing, except behave yourself and go to school, perhaps."

"Yer kiddin' me, ain't yer?"

"No, I'm not. Take a chance and try it."

The idea was too big for the boy to absorb all at once. He was not at all sure that the man was giving it to him straight; it seemed straight enough, but there must be something wrong somewhere. He stared at Thorpe.

"Well, how about it?" Thorpe asked, and smiled.

"Will you take a chance?"

Inspiration came to the boy in a flash. "Sure, I'll take a chance. You look square."

Mrs. John Thorpe had been Martha Coles. At twenty she had been a tall, slender and, in a severe way, rather pretty girl, very strict as to her deportment, very narrow

in her views,—the natural result of heredity and environment. John Thorpe, when he married her, had supposed that he was getting a very sensible, good-looking, and intelligent woman.

They had had no children and as, in the first place, John Thorpe believed that it was every man's duty to the State to have children, and, in the second place, he wanted children without any reference whatever to the State, he naturally was disappointed. There were many people who were not surprised that Martha Thorpe had no children; she was the sort of woman who did n't have children, or at most had one child, and found that one a great responsibility, a great trial, and a great disappointment. John Thorpe had tried to make the idea of adopting children pleasant to her and had failed completely. When the inspiration came that day on the banks of the Hudson, at Spuyten Duyvil, he took the first step toward adopting a boy without consulting her.

Thus, when Ben arrived at her house, he was received by a narrow-minded, disagreeable woman who would have no pleasant word or thought for any boy, much less for such a ruffian as he. If Martha Thorpe had been kind-hearted and motherly, if she had taken Ben in her arms and under her loving care, perhaps his life would have been very different from what it turned out to be; but Providence, wise or unwise, saw to it that she was n't that kind of woman and that she did nothing of the sort.

It is not surprising that in addition to her other unfortunate characteristics Martha Thorpe should have been jealous. She was jealous of women who had children, though she wanted no children of her own; she was jealous of every one who had anything that she did not have, and argued with herself and with others that it was wrong that they should have those things. She was a futile, selfish woman; she was nevertheless an excellent

housekeeper, her house was always neat as a pin. John Thorpe, when the bloom of romance had worn off, understood her thoroughly. He was terribly disappointed, but said never a word of it; he accepted the situation and made the best of it.

John Thorpe was no man of genius · he had, perhaps, made no great success of his life, but not a masterful man nevertheless. He had risen from nothing to a position of considerable importance in the railroad. His men had a wholesome respect for him, based as much on regard and affection as on the fear they had of him; he was seldom roused, but when he was roused his hand was heavy and he spoke his mind in no uncertain terms. His wife knew that and feared his anger. She had learned her lesson years before and it had not been necessary for him to repeat it. John Thorpe was a simple man and lived simply, he was a man of few words, he was not hard to please in his own house, he asked little of his wife, he seldom disagreed with her, but when his mind was made up nothing that she could do could change it. She knew that and she knew from his voice when his mind was made up, and she obeyed without a question.

When he brought Ben home late that afternoon and said, "I've brought a young friend to stay a while," she knew better than to protest; it could do no good.

She would have disliked any boy so brought to her house; she hated Ben the moment she saw him. Just as the boy had fascinated Thorpe, so, instantly, he roused antagonism and a deep animosity in her.

She looked at him and trembled; he was a terrible spectacle, a horrible creature, in her eyes. He was, in fact, a very dirty boy, without shoes or stockings or cap or collar; his sole garments were an old pair of trousers and a cotton shirt with the dirt of weeks upon it. He

did not speak to her, for he knew nothing to say and he did not wish to speak, anyway. In the first place she was a woman and he disliked her for that reason; he saw hatred in her eyes and hated her for that; and besides being a woman and having that look in her eyes, she had something else about her that he did not like. It was that thing which most men and boys, without any perception at all, would have disliked, the woman's very nature.

When John Thorpe and the boy entered the house, no explanations were made. Martha Thorpe accepted the inevitable, but her soul revolted.

Thorpe, who had long ago put aside his desire to adopt a boy, had found a boy thrust upon him; then, with the desire again aroused, he had considered the matter with inward fear and trembling, as being a thing serious, foolhardy, and revolutionary. But on the train between Spuyten Duyvil and Lanville his inward fear had vanished, a glorious vision had taken its place, his great heart had bounded with joy, and his determination had been made. The boy's stay should not be for "a while" but for always, and, his mind made up, he planned quickly.

There was time before dinner for the purchase of clothes that would do for the present, and time for a bath, which was badly needed. Neither he nor Ben said much, but went about the business methodically, each with grim determination on his face. Ben did not understand it at all, it was a procedure the like of which he had never conceived, it was an experience far beyond his powers of imagining; he was not sure that he liked it, it suggested complications that were not altogether pleasant, it was an entry into a world of which he knew nothing and for which he was not sure he cared.

The bath-tub, hot water, towels, soap, brushes, hair-brush, comb, a clean room with a clean bed waiting, shoes,

a collar, tie, knives and forks, glasses, china, napkins, salt-cellar, glass,—all those he knew something of; he had seen them all at one time or another and had some meager idea what to do with them, but finding them all together, in that atmosphere, was overpowering. At dinner he felt Mrs. Thorpe's burning eyes on him, constantly; his hands seemed enormous and clumsy, he had no knowledge of how things should be done. Ben did not speak, but ate, and did well at that, for his breakfast had been coffee and bread and his lunch fruit and milk, a long time before.

It was a silent meal, but it was the first wholesome food in unlimited quantity that Ben had had since his memory ran, and perhaps it was so sordid a thing as food that gave the boy faith in the man who had provided it, and made him experience his first sensation of deep respect. All before that had been affection of a sort, admiration engendered more often than not by a strong arm. Wherever that sensation of respect came from and whatever brought it, faith had come to Ben and the love of man for man followed close upon its heels.

After dinner, John Thorpe, planning quickly and positively, took Ben to call on W. Breckenridge Hackett. Hackett was twenty-five years old, thin, short and pale, and with a poor excuse for a mustache. That night he wore his one suit of clothes, black but more spotted than black, a frayed collar and a frayed necktie; his socks were badly in need of garters and he was sadly in need of a job. Three years before he had been graduated from Harvard, and Harvard had never suspected for an instant that she was sending into the world anything more than a hopeless nonentity who, by unending labor, had stood a little better than average in his class. As a matter of fact, Harvard had sent forth a genius and for three years the genius had taught mathematics in the Lanville

High School and people were beginning to suspect that he was no common man.

He had saved enough money to live on through that summer when his mother, who had needed more than half his small pay, had died and every cent of his savings had gone in funeral expenses. School had been over but two days and he had been hunting for work when work walked up the path to the door of his boarding-house.

Breckenridge Hackett entered the life of Ben the outcast and has never left the life of Ben the reclaimed. How genius ever came to be in that frail body the Lord alone knows, but there it was and it lay in the ability to teach and to understand youth. Youth, from the cleverest pupil to the dullest, from the huge athlete to the scrawniest little girl, forgot the face and figure of him and heard only his low, thrilling voice which drove away despair and let light into dark places, and saw the smile that brought cheer and comfort.

John Thorpe explained matters to Hackett and Hackett agreed to take the boy in hand for the summer, tutoring him both for school and for society; and if ever Providence arranged things right, it did it when it put Ben in Hackett's hands. Hackett suspected that he had undertaken a man-sized job.

The program was three hours of book-work in the mornings and such things as Hackett thought best in the afternoons, with or without his direct supervision. Ben talked to Hackett that night, expanding under his questions; he told of his life, how and where he had lived, what he had done in school and what he had learned of reading, writing, and arithmetic outside of school. Even as John Thorpe had fascinated him, so Hackett fascinated him; his shell of reserve fell away from him, his tongue released itself and in the only language he knew he told his story, unconscious of its pathos.

Twenty-four hours after he had hidden under the shanty in Spuyten Duyvil, Ben was sitting on a rail fence with Hackett on one side of him and two boys on the other. He did not understand what had happened or why it had happened, but the condition of affairs was plain enough. He knew by blind faith that John Thorpe was playing no game, that John meant what he said when he told him to do his best, to do what Hackett told him, to behave himself, and he'd see that he was happy and well taken care of and got his chance to make a man of himself.

The lesson in the morning had been no such thing as those he had known in school, but a sort of game that was good fun. He had slept as he had never slept before and he had had such a breakfast as he had never had before. He had gone to the train with John Thorpe and said good-by to him there, and when Thorpe was gone and he was walking up the hill there had been in him, though he did not know it himself, a determination to make good for the sake of the man who, for some mysterious reason, had been good to him.

The resolution to make good had come quickly,—too quickly, perhaps, to be entirely trusted. It might have changed. But, as it happened, it did not change. As the days passed the resolution became stronger and stronger. Of course there were practical considerations; life with Ben was as it should be, and so it should remain if he had anything to say about it. He appreciated his good fortune to the full. A good, clean bed was better than no bed or a pile of dirty blankets in a smelly room with a couple of cross women who drank and made all kinds of trouble. Plenty of wonderful food was far better than no food at all or food that was greasy and half cooked; a big, comfortable house and good dry clothes were better than no house and few clothes, or one dirty

room and a very few cheap clothes that were always wet when it had been raining. Any fool would know those things. And there was something else, such as passing a cop face to face without an eye to a quick get-away; and the right sort of place to play, and things like balls and bats and footballs to play with were not to be laughed at. And there was something else more important than all the other things put together and that other thing was hero-worship, though Ben did 'nt call it that, and for it were two heroes, each entirely unlike the other and therefore doubly satisfactory.

Lanville boys were an unknown type to Ben and a brand-new experience. Hackett selected two for that first walk back to the Saw Mill River, and they in turn performed later on such introductions to "the crowd" as were necessary. Heaven had bestowed upon Ben a gift of inestimable value, a personality that attracted those whom he liked, and he liked nearly every one who was of the male persuasion.

He made no attempt to push himself to the fore among the Lanville boys, he made no claim to prowess in sports or in anything else, he did not bully boys smaller than himself, nor toady to bigger boys. He agreed with their opinions almost always, he fell in with their plans; if sometimes he made suggestions he did it quietly, with a smile, without antagonizing. The boys learned quickly that he was a far better ball-player and swimmer than any other boy of his age in town, and that gave him prestige; there was about him, too, a certain calmness and good judgment that won respect. He quickly became a leader among them, though he made no attempt to assume leadership.

No one resented his success, no one was envious or disagreeable except Sam Bannon, who wanted the place himself and who did not deserve it. He was fourteen, a

spoiled only child, the son of a man who had no knowledge of boys or what was good for them, and who took pride in having his son the richest boy in Lanville, believing that wealth would make the way to success among his fellows easy for him. Sam was a bully, vain, conceited, and selfish. At first he irritated Ben and then did more than that and Ben would have no more to do with him than he must.

He asked Hackett about Sam and Hackett did his best to explain Sam without criticizing him too harshly; but that was difficult, for Hackett understood Sam thoroughly. The enmity between the two boys smoldered and there was some smoke. The fire was to come later. It was easy to like the other boys and understand them, but Ben could n't understand Sam Bannon, Hackett or no Hackett. Another thing Ben did n't understand was the absence of fights; the easy thing would have been to fight Sam and settle the trouble; he asked Mr. Hackett about it and Hackett explained that it was n't done. It was a brand-new idea to Ben, but he took his teacher's word for it.

Ben was no paragon. Life during that summer was not all smooth sailing for him or Hackett or Thorpe; it was impossible that it should be. Hackett and Thorpe were content that the boy should do his best, and Ben did that and the gift from heaven helped him mightily, the gift that made him go slow and love his fellow-man and that gave him some understanding of the things that counted and those that did n't.

Hackett and Thorpe were together after supper on the Sunday before the Monday on which school opened.

"I made no mistake, I'm thinking, Hackett," Thorpe said.

"Very far from a mistake; it was an inspiration."

"Perhaps it was an inspiration. I'd always wanted

children of my own and when I knew that could n't be I wanted to adopt a boy. I saw the lad before he saw me and the minute I saw him I had a feeling that he had no business being in that crowd in the yard. There was something about him,—the shape of him perhaps, or the expression of his face, or the way he carried himself,—that caught my eye. I took to him as a duck takes to water, and chance brought him into the shanty with me. He told me about himself and told me the truth, but it made no difference. I 'll never believe that he is exactly what he believes himself to be."

"Have you ever found his mother?"

"I have, and she is what he said she was. She made no objection to giving up the boy; she said she did not know who the boy's father was and she stuck to the name she was known by, but would tell nothing of her family. Her mind was nearly gone and her physical strength, too."

"Bastard or not," Hackett said, "there 's good blood in him or there 's nothing in heredity. There may be a story back of it all. How old is the woman now?"

"She said she was thirty-two."

"Then she was twenty when he was born and only nineteen when she went wrong. Her story may be true, or it may not. She may know who the boy's father is; there may be a real tragedy under the sordid one. There 's good blood in Ben or a miracle has happened."

"It 's too soon to tell much about him yet, I suppose." It was half question, half statement of fact, leading the younger man on.

"No, I don't think it is too soon. Don't imagine that you have a saint on your hands. There 's a devil in the boy, a big devil, but I don't think it 's a very bad devil. Considering what his life must have been, it 's a very good devil. He 'll take a lot of watching, a lot of helping,

a lot of steering in the right channels. My hardest job has been to make him understand the elementary principles of law and order; he has n't broken over the traces yet, perhaps he never will, but so far he has n't because he has obeyed my orders and not because he understood the principles involved. I don't think he has more than an inkling of them yet, but the saving grace is that he wants to understand. What discipline that is forced on him will do, discipline that he does n't accept of his own accord, I don't know, and we v'e got to watch that point carefully and get him over the shoals or there'll be trouble for somebody. The thing I'm most afraid of is the effect that woman teachers will have on him. To start with, he hates women, hates them in a most unusual and emphatic way, and women teachers can be terribly hard on a boy, especially if they are the irritating sort of female that many of them are. The only hope for a woman teaching boys is to make them love her; mighty few ever make them respect her. And if any teacher can make Ben love her, she's a wonder."

"Curious, very curious, his hatred of women," Thorpe said. "I don't understand it, but it will wear off. It's bashfulness largely, I suppose. He is bright at his studies, you say."

"Better than average, a good deal better, and there's this about him: when he's got a thing he's got it. He never says he understands when he does n't; when he says he does, I don't have to worry about it any more, it's in his brain for good and all. He's methodical and never gets discouraged, and works hard. The one thing about him which impresses me most is his power of concentration; if he were not so strong and healthy, it would almost worry me. It is very remarkable for a boy of twelve. I honestly believe that if he were studying and

a circus parade went by, he would n't notice it. He plays, does everything, the same way."

On the first Monday in September Ben went to the Lanville Grammar School. It was a good school; almost every boy and girl in Lanville went to it and in school affairs at least the individual stood on his or her own feet. There was hardly such a thing as great wealth in the country town and very little social distinction; the day had not come when country-clubs, golf, and automobiles split country towns in two.

Hackett had arranged all the details of Ben's entrance into school life and had put him in a class a year ahead of that into which he would have gone if Hackett had not had faith that the boy would fight his way through, even against great odds. Hackett would have gone out of Ben's life then if Thorpe, disliking the thought of the removal of that great influence for good, had not arranged for them to spend an hour a day together, to make up for what had been lacking in the years before.

By that time Ben had been legally adopted and was Benjamin Thorpe, and had a safe place in the world. And the affection between John Thorpe and the boy, founded by a trick of fate on a June day, had grown and grown until it was a deep love, filled with faith each for the other.

CHAPTER II

UNTIL Ben came to Lanville he had never known comfort nor the least degree of refinement. He had been to school a little, he had sold papers a great deal, but he had not cared particularly for either of those pastimes. He had liked to play games and he played every minute that he could steal away from more serious pursuits. He liked baseball better than anything else, probably because its principle and paraphernalia were simple and because it was played, in one form or another, on every street and in every vacant lot.

He liked football but got little chance to play it; jaunts into the country, swimming, skating, and other forms of recreation and exercise consumed much of his time, so much that paper-selling very nearly became a lost art. Paper-selling was not pleasant in itself and the fact that the proceeds had to be turned over to his mother or concealed and lied about did not make it any pleasanter.

When his grandmother died and his mother was taken away he had no difficulty whatever in taking care of himself, and he had known for some time before that, a year maybe, that he could get along better alone than with the women. The little furniture that their three rooms held went for back rent, under the heavy hand of the landlord, but Ben managed to get away with a blanket or two and two or three other useful articles, and Dolan, the stableman, made no objection to his sleeping in the loft. Do-

lan's attitude may have been the result of his charitable tendencies or it may have been pure selfishness, for he liked Ben and spent many an evening with the boy perched opposite him, asking questions about everything under the sun, much faster than Dolan could have answered them if he had known the answers. Then, too, the kid was honest and would do anything on earth for a friend.

Angelo Teti, the Italian, who served a full course dinner for a quarter, felt much the same way about it and fed Ben after a fashion, there being something more than a business relationship between them—food in exchange for dirty work about the place. With food and lodging sure, clothes were the only other thing needed and that question had n't risen; there had been enough left over for the summer after the women were gone, and Dolan had a tidy sum in his safe that belonged to Ben. Selling papers was n't such a bad business when you kept all the profits.

So the departure of the women-folk was no catastrophe at all. Ben knew well enough what his mother was and was not worried in the least about the moral aspect of her profession. His friends said nothing to him on the subject, his acquaintances suggested that it was a subject of mirth,—perhaps, to some extent, of ridicule,—but that was about all.

Ben hated his mother; to him she was revolting, though the sensation was not analyzed. Ben had little conception of the cause of his dislike, but the dislike was plain enough. The life she led outside the house had nothing to do with it; it was just she, herself, at home. She was sloppy, dirty; there was not an atom of womanly attractiveness about her, she drank more than was good for her,—not as much as the grandmother but too much nevertheless,—and she 'd drink with any man who would

buy drink for her, no matter who he was, and the boy resented the fact. She preferred beer. Most of the time she cursed Ben; he suited her not at all, either personally or in the matter of the money brought home. She talked and talked and talked about nothing at all; she called him names because he did not eat enough of the poor food she provided for him or did n't eat it fast enough; she objected to everything he did, and found fault because he would not talk and because he paid no attention to her. All of that was bad enough, but worse still were the times she got maudlin and loved him; then she tried to kiss him and hug him and cry over him, which was more than he could bear. He did not understand why he stayed with her; it seemed foolish to do it, but, deeply as he hated her, there was something that made him stay. He did n't know what it was; he was only twelve and could hardly be expected to know, and perhaps he would not have stayed much longer if she had not been taken away and saved him from deciding the point.

Bad as his mother was, his grandmother was worse; she drank until she was drunk whenever there was money enough. Ben did not understand her at all, why she was there, what useful purpose she served, or anything about her. As a matter of fact, he sometimes suspected that she was not his grandmother at all, or any relation whatever.

Those two were the only women Ben really knew and he formed his opinion of women from them. Certain other women, such as Angelo Teti's wife, he looked upon as inferior beings, as indeed they were, hardly more than slaves to their husbands. Another class, nearly all-embracing, he looked upon as unpleasant nuisances and ignored as much as was physically possible. They were the women who lived, respectably, on his street, respectably but cantankerously and obstreperously. They had

sons and daughters; they knew the sinful life Ben's mother led, and vented their wrath on Ben's head, and ears; he was not fit to associate with the children of honest women and they did their best to show him his place, or lack of it, in society. In that they failed so far as Ben was concerned, though they may have derived pleasure from heaping maledictions on the erring one and her child.

Thus before the miracle happened Ben had never known a good and kind woman and had known many bad and bad-tempered women. They formed a remarkable contrast with the men he knew. It was so easy to get on with men; they were white and decent and friendly, they were comfortable and had sense and made no trouble, whereas women made nothing but trouble and shrieked at you. Just for example, to show what could be done, Andy Harris, the cop, swore that once he could lay hands on Ben he'd run him in and do various other awful things, and meant it, and Ben walked up to him and stood before him and Andy only grinned. Of course strange cops were different, but the principle was plain enough; men were all right, women were not.

Luck played a sorry jest when it brought Ben face to face with Martha Thorpe. At first he was a little afraid of her; he was sure that she had authority in the house, as all women had, and he was sure that she would use it to his discomfort. He decided the minute he saw her, with some budding genius that was his, that the thing to do was to give her nothing to hang a complaint on, and that most important to that end was to keep quiet. Women talked everlastingly and the more you talked back the worse it was. The answer was simple.

Ben watched John Thorpe and saw that he spoke very little and that his wife did not jaw him, which convinced Ben of the wisdom of his course. He was there because

Mr. Thorpe had brought him there, and stayed because Mr. Thorpe wanted him to stay; the woman had nothing to do with it and Ben therefore ignored her as far as possible, and he was able to do it with a thoroughness and persistency that drove her nearly crazy. Following his policy, he never gave her cause to complain of him, he obeyed her orders implicitly and without question; he kept his room in order, he cleaned his shoes thoroughly before coming into the house, he did such bits of work as he was called upon to do without shirking and without complaint. John Thorpe's example, Hackett's teaching, and Mrs. Thorpe's criticism were sufficient to effect with amazing rapidity a change in his choice of words, and a general smoothing out of his English, so that by the time school began his speech was not very different from that of the other boys in Lanville and Mrs. Thorpe was forced to forego that subject.

The fundamental trouble was, of course, with Martha Thorpe; she was not a womanly woman, she had no heart worth mentioning. Ben knew she hated him and gloried in it and tormented her with such cunning that he could not be caught red-handed. She attempted to instil Christianity into him and he would have none of it; he listened and believed not, and would not have believed simply because she said he must, even if all evidence had not been against what she told him was true. His frankness shocked her beyond words, for she believed that every word of the Bible stories was literally true, and those who believed otherwise were steering straight for hell. The church was her great friend and consoler, which may or may not have been a feather in the church's cap.

But Martha knew, even before Ben was legally adopted, that he had come to stay, she knew that John Thorpe's affection for the boy was deep and abiding, and increasing every day, and that any protest would simply make

things harder for her. Therefore she suffered her torture in silence, which spoke volumes for John Thorpe.

Martha Thorpe was, when all was said and done, simply another woman to Ben,—one of the race sent to earth to annoy men and make trouble, which was an extremely unfortunate point of view for a boy of twelve.

Another aspect of the situation appeared during the summer and remained for a long time thereafter; it was similar to the condition brought about by the honest women in Ben's neighborhood in New York who knew about his mother. John Thorpe had told Ben not to say a word about his mother and he had not, so that blot on his escutcheon was not known in Lanville, but it was known that he had come from the slums and that he was a derelict; this, coupled with the fact that by no possible chance was he ever gracious to women or ever approached them in a friendly spirit, led all the mothers of Lanville to look upon him askance. If he had made the slightest attempt to ingratiate himself with them there would have been, undoubtedly, a change of opinion and many a hand would have been held out to help him. But he did nothing of the sort and as a result he was looked upon as a sullen, rude, and dangerous boy, whose language was certainly unsuited for polite ears and whose influence was dangerous to the youthful.

It was hard to keep boys away from him, Lanville was a small place and all the boys played together, but Lanville mothers drew the line so far as daughters were concerned. Lanville daughters were a very proper lot and a bit clannish and when the word was passed around that the new boy was n't nice they took great joy in pretending that they snubbed him of their own volition, instead of by parental order.

Ben knew nothing of it, and probably would have gone on in ignorance of his ostracism if Sam Bannon had not

told him about it. Children's parties were given in Lanville on birthdays and sometimes even without that excuse. Ben was not invited to them, and Sam Bannon explained why, and Ben laughed at him. He laughed at the girls, too, inside, and went on his way ignoring them, and it was no pose assumed to save his face but his honest attitude. He had no use on earth for girls.

The truth slowly dawned on the young maidens, and the tables were turned. Brothers spoke admiringly of the new boy, many sang his praises in no uncertain terms, word got about that the boy was n't as bad as he had been painted. Hackett spoke more than well of him, and curiosity was aroused, not only among the girls but among their mothers. But it was too late then, if it had ever been possible to approach Ben; he would have none of them. Men, boys, and the open country were his loves.

When school opened, Ben went into the charge of women teachers. Hackett's fears as to the effect these women would have upon Ben proved unfounded so far as matters of discipline were concerned, but the effect was curious nevertheless. He had been used to a man who was master of the art of teaching, and who had never found it necessary to discipline any one; he found the women fidgety, unsure of themselves, apparently in constant fear of rebellion, constantly on the lookout for breaches of the peace, and showing a strong liking for certain pupils and strong dislike for others. Personal and unnecessary reprimands were issued in public on the principle that the resulting shame made them doubly effective.

He took problems to Hackett that staggered that paragon. What young girl, fresh from college, working long hours and harassed by a mob of wild boys and girls, can be expected to lead a calm, unerring life in the school-

room? When one of these teachers made a mistake the devil in Ben saw it and carried it to Hackett, with demands for an explanation why such things must be, and the paragon was often hard put to it to satisfy the boy and at the same time his own sense of honor and loyalty to his fellow-teachers.

Ben compared these teachers with Hackett and if ever a comparison was odious that one was. For nearly three months, for three hours and more a day, he had been taught by a man who not only had a genius for teaching but who had a genius for understanding youth. The teachers had no genius of any sort, they had little knowledge of the art of teaching and no love for it; it was no more than a means of supporting life till the right man came along; and, of course worst of all to Ben, they were women.

Woman-like, they had no deep knowledge of right and wrong; justice was a queer thing with no sense to it; they were governed by their emotions and were fond of those among their pupils who had n't spunk enough to raise the dickens. To them Ben was some sort of monstrosity, a boy with a terribly keen mind and no sense of proportion, a bull in a china shop, and they could n't get under his hide. He did n't talk much and there was something insolent about his silence; he was sullen, there was everlasting derision in his manner, yet he never did anything that they were sure he knew was wrong, they could never find a plausible excuse for punishing him. There was defiance in his eyes, a grim determination not to yield to them in any way whatsoever. And they could not complain of his work.

Curiously enough, some of those good women would have known no greater happiness than to have that terrible boy smile upon them, show signs of affection for them, and even perhaps kiss them and let them fondle

him. Instead they received disdain. They knew how the boy had come to Lanville and from where he had come. Not much of good was to be expected from such a source, and yet they knew that by some miracle a very remarkable boy had come among them, a boy who had a most unusual mind and who, already, was the recognized leader among boys of his age in the school, a boy whom the older boys looked on with affection and respect, a boy who hated women. They resented that hatred and tried their best to destroy it, without the slightest success.

Such was the general condition of affairs in the early winter just before the snow flew and then, overnight, the boy took his place on the pedestal, far above his fellows in Lanville,—a place he was never to relinquish. The incident brought Jane Dobson on the scene.

The trouble had been brewing for a long time and a small child brought it to a head. Ben, walking home from school, saw Sam Bannon sitting on a fence post and a small boy on the sidewalk before him, half crying, half screaming in a wild temper. Sam had taken from him some treasure and, out of reach, was having his idea of fun watching the child's anguish.

Somewhere in Ben was a very, very soft spot. Perhaps it had been born in him, perhaps his own rescue had put it in him, but from wherever it had come, he hated to see the strong oppress the weak and especially to see a little child unhappy. He loved little children, he even let down the bars to women if they were very small girls, and when he saw Sam torturing the small boy his anger rose, a red mist came across his eyes, and he went straight for Sam Bannon. But there was to be no issue this time, for a door opened, a woman appeared, yelled, and the affair was settled.

This was not the first time. Sam had done many things like that before, things which had made Ben hate him.

The feud between him and Ben had been on for many a day, under cover, and was bound to come out into the open sooner or later. The time came just after Christmas. Again a small boy was ravished of a prized toy and was in tears, and this time there was no one near to save either Sam or Ben. The toy dropped from Sam's hand, the child rescued it and flew, and before the news of the fight spread, the end had come.


If Sam Bannon was a coward, he was afraid, when the time to fight came, to show it. Indeed, it never entered his head that he could n't lick Ben. Though two years older than Ben, he was no taller, but he weighed much more, and two years adds much strength to a boy between his twelfth and fourteenth year. He knew what it would mean if Ben Thorpe licked him: it meant derision, it meant that the proud position in which Sam's treating to candy and soda had placed him would vanish, it meant the end of the dandy, Sam Bannon.

He saw Ben coming and understood perfectly. There was no argument, no talk, no preliminary daring of each other to do this or that; he saw Ben's face, dropped the toy, and waited, ready. Blind with rage, Ben came and met Sam Bannon's fist fair with his nose. His head went back and his knees caved under him. Sam laughed and his voice cut Ben like a knife. Then Sam set out to finish the job and his fists flew and Ben fell back and back, and then, as backward movement became impossible, round and round. Fast and furious Sam swung his arms like flails, scorning all resistance. But always arm and fist fell on arm and shoulder. Had Sam Bannon known anything of the art of boxing, the fight would have been short and sad for Ben Thorpe, but Sam did n't and youth is quick to revive and soon the effects of that first blow passed away and Ben was able to see clearly and, seeing, understand. He watched and waited, parrying blow after

blow, till the time came when Sam's arms were moving not quite so fast and did not land quite so heavily. Ben's legs were strong again, too, and he stood still, waiting for the time to come. He, too, knew nothing of the art of boxing, but he had the instinct for it and had learned the practical side in a hard school where no one ever quit.

He waited and the time came; Sam felt something hard and hot strike his cheek and glance off, and even while he was wondering what it was, it struck again and a sudden fear swept over him. Thorpe was n't finished and Thorpe was two years younger than he, and the girls would n't speak to him and—and such a thing could n't be, must n't be, and Sam Bannon, gathering all the strength that was left in him, went in to end it. He met a young boy, hardly more than a child, standing with his feet braced, calm and unhittable. He met fists flying like pistons, fists flying true, to eyes, to nose, to jaw, bruising flesh. Sam Bannon forgot that he was Sam Bannon the magnificent, forgot that he was the larger, older boy, forgot everything except that he was fighting for his proud place in the community, and his pride kept him on his feet too long for his own good, for the other boy had forgotten everything except that before him was a brute, a bully, an enemy who must be destroyed.

Sam Bannon made one last despairing rush, and Ben took full toll of it. Sam's eyes were nearly closed, his lips were cut to tatters, two teeth had gone down his throat, the flesh over his cheek-bones was a raw pulp, and still Ben had not finished the work he had to do. The rush was stopped, Sam's arms fell limp and the head fell forward, the knees bent and the time for collapse had come. And then a blow landed full on the point of his jaw, starting from Ben's hip and coming up with all the weight in the boy's body behind it, and Sam Bannon's head went back and his body stiffened. Then there came



another blow from the shoulder, calmly and methodically planned, and executed with every ounce of Ben's strength,—and Sam went over backward and down and lay motionless on the frozen ground.

For a moment Ben stood and looked at him, then turned and walked down the road. At a watering-trough he broke the ice and washed the blood from his face, straightened his necktie, and, like a man yawning, stretched his arms over his head and smiled; and as he walked home he smiled and smiled and smiled.

Behind him Sam Bannon stirred and opened his eyes; consciousness came slowly back and he got on his knees, he stumbled to his feet and managed to reach a tree. He could hardly see between the blackened, bulging eyelids, the road moved backward and forward and then up and down. He tried to step away from the tree, but there was no ground to step on and he held on as tightly as he could. Finally he was able to stand without holding on to anything; half an hour later he dropped into the hay in his father's stable, ashamed and afraid to be seen, and in a terrible condition.

Ben Thorpe went to his room and looked into the mirror. There was not a mark on his face, but his collar was covered with blood. He put on a clean collar, washed his hands, which were very sore and bruised, went to the window, and, standing in the rays of the setting sun, smiled again, a very grim smile for a boy of twelve. Then he turned, lighted his lamp, took a book, and went to work.

Hackett came and the boy told him the story in a simple, matter-of-fact way. It had had to come and it had come, and it would n't be necessary to do it again. He could n't help it; he knew that fighting was wrong, but that did n't make any difference: he had warned Sam over and over again; nothing could have stopped him

when he saw Sam. He did not tell how he had fought: how he had forgotten everything except the battering to pieces of that hated face; how he had struck the last two blows, or how, when the thing was finished, he knew that he was a man and had a man's strength, and had gone away not caring whether the other were dead or alive.

Hackett did a great deal of thinking and very little talking. Down in his heart he knew that it had been a job that needed doing. When, later, he heard of the frightfulness of the thing, of the terrible beating that Bannon had suffered and of how the doctors had worked over him, he feared for his own boy. If at twelve he could do such a thing as this, what would the man do? But he need not have feared: Ben Thorpe had fought his last fight with his fists,—but one.

Of course Lanville was thrown into a furor. Every man who knew the first thing about it said it was a damned good job, every boy made a hero of Ben and asked to see his hands, every woman said that he was a disgrace to the community and wished that she had a man child like him; and every girl looked upon him with horror and longed to have him for a special friend. Ben had removed a sore spot from among them and there was rejoicing, under a thin veneer of horror at the awful brutality of the method. Sam Bannon left Lanville, to go to a private school, and Lanville knew him no more.

Ben said nothing of the fight to any one but Hackett and John Thorpe. He appeared at school the next morning exactly as he appeared every morning, and it took two days for the news to leak out that Sam Bannon was in bed under the doctor's care and that Ben Thorpe had put him there. Dr. Waring told somebody and the word went the rounds that he would n't have believed it physically possible that a twelve-year-old boy could so batter to pieces another boy and knock him out cold. As a matter

of muscle it was remarkable enough, but the will to do it and the determination were more remarkable still, especially as, if young Bannon told the truth, he had had the boy beaten at one time.

Ben refused to comment, he asked for no adulation or glorification. It was a job that had had to be done, both because of what Sam Bannon was and because of something or other that had been inside Ben and that had to be let out. So far as he was concerned it was past and done with.

Sam Bannon was, before the fight, in the first-year class in the high school, and accordingly under the care of Jane Dobson, the vice-principal, who was advised of his absence and then of the reason for it. She had no love for Sam and she would have been wise if she had done nothing and let well enough alone, but that was not her way. It is highly probable that Jane Dobson loved a fight, though if that were so it seemed that she chose antagonists quite out of her class. In this case she went beyond her proper jurisdiction and sent for Ben, to tell him a few things for the good of his soul.

Why Jane Dobson had been made into a school-teacher is past understanding; she would have made a far better slave-driver or something which required an icy exterior, vindictiveness, persistence in discipline, and a love of authority. The mere fact that inside Jane there was a heart warmer than most and that she craved love and was denied it, is of no importance; she was what the youth of Lanville thought she was, and Jane had no right to complain of her reputation. Her name was a synonym for discipline, punishment, gruelings. A few young women rather apart from the rest of the community defended her, but most girls and every boy hated her wholeheartedly, emphatically, and without reservation.


She was a thin, tall, sharp-eyed woman, and she walked

seemingly on tiptoe always, as though that practice, learned in the business of stalking malefactors, had become so strong a habit that it could not be put aside even in strictly private life. Ben at first sight of her had said one word, "Mouse," and it had swept over Lanville, accompanied by amazement that nobody had ever thought of it before. Jane Dobson looked exactly like a mouse.

Jane of course knew about Ben Thorpe, as every one did, and she was strongly of the opinion that he would be a very bad influence in the school. When she heard the story of his fight with Sam Bannon her opinion became conviction, and she knew her duty.

Ben entered her presence, which was contained in her private office, and closed the door behind him. There was another door: Jane glared at Ben, raised her eyebrows, tiptoed across the room to the door, shut it, and with her eyes on Ben glided back to her chair. Never in all her professional career had her eyes failed to overcome a pupil's eyes. This time they did fail: Ben's eyes never left hers; he stood before her, his mouth shut tight, the muscles of his jaw rigid, and his eyes never wavered; he was not afraid of her and Jane Dobson knew it. She was so surprised and her system was so rudely shattered that she abandoned her usual opening phrase, "Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" in most terrifying tones, and instead rushed into maledictions. She told Ben, in effect, that he was on the way to hell and that he could n't go through that school on the way to it; it was improbable, if not impossible, that he would mend his ways, but if he did n't he would have to seek his education elsewhere, if it was n't too late already, and so on and on.

Her harangue had not the slightest visible effect on Ben, and she tried another tack. She went over the details of his crime as though she enjoyed doing it, for she



lingered on her description of the most gory parts and the final knockout,—a description which had been largely manufactured in the first place and then exaggerated, as it passed from mouth to mouth, as far as it was capable of exaggeration.

Ben listened to her as though he were bored, as he was. He had grave doubts that it was any of the Mouse's business, or anybody's business but his and Sam Bannon's, and he certainly had no interest in the Mouse's opinion of it. Finally Jane Dobson, finding that she was making not the slightest headway, went back to first principles. Her voice was calculated to make the mightiest tremble, to say nothing of a child.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" The point was that Ben could not possibly have anything to say for himself. Ben said nothing.

"Can't you speak?" she demanded.

"Yes." The boy's eyes had never left hers.

"Then why don't you?"

"What's the use? Women don't know anything about that kind o' thing."

There was too much truth in that for Jane. She knew that she could do nothing with the boy; if she had not been a coward she would never have put on the mask of ferocity which she always wore before the school. Now she bluffed by pointing to the door and trying to give Ben the impression that he would hear from her again.

He went to the door, opened it and, with his hand on the knob, turned to her and looked at her as though she were a curious, futile thing. Unconsciously his lips curled into the faintest suspicion of a smile. Jane Dobson's face went scarlet; Ben went out, closing the door behind him.

He had despised women, now he despised and hated one, hated her as he had never hated any one before.

CHAPTER III

THE stigma of Ben's unknown origin, or, worse still, of his disgraceful origin, soon passed away and parents withdrew their objections to him. The annihilation of Sam Bannon had been brutal, but if it was an offense against the community, it was Ben's only serious offense. Hackett had said that there must be no fighting; once it had been impossible not to fight, but only once. Hackett's word was law, to be obeyed without question; breaking that law once helped to prove it; with Sam Bannon gone Ben understood as he had not understood before. He had won the fight against big odds, he had seen his enemy bloody and motionless on the ground at his feet and he had gloried in his triumph, he had gloried in his strength; he had told Hackett all about it and Hackett had not spoken harshly or reprimanded him severely, he had said very little, but that little and the bruised flesh of Bannon's face had made Ben understand.

It was wonderful to be able to fight, it was good to know that you could fight and win, but it was better not to want to fight or to have to fight. The other boys understood the situation—that Ben did n't want to fight, but "Gee! Maybe he can't fight when he wants to!" Sam Bannon in the doctor's care was indelibly engraved on their minds' eye. The principle of the soft word and the big club was there, if not the phrase.

Big boys, boys up to eighteen, did a little investigating, trying out the kid, and did n't get anywhere, for he took

hard knocks with a grin and stood up under the inquisition without a whimper, and the fun was over; the kid had guts. Mothers discovered that disturbances of the peace were fewer than before Ben had come upon the scene; there were deviltry and excitement enough, but little internal warfare; there was more order in games and less personal combat. The boy seemed to be an influence for good; other boys, returning home at supper-time, held forth on his virtues and prowess, and there was seldom any unpleasant aftermath to an afternoon's sport.

Many mothers approached Ben with figuratively outstretched hands, fruitlessly. Some of them said that he was bashful, some that he was sullen, all that he was a queer boy. Of course he would get over it, lots of boys were much as he was, disliking such things as birthday parties, dancing-classes, and formal meals at which best clothes were necessary; lots of boys, at that age, hated girls, thought that they weren't any good but only nuisances. They always got over it and Ben would, sooner or later.

Ben went to one party; he was ordered to go and he went, but the going was all there was to it. He went into the house, into a sea of white dresses and blue and pink sashes, and he kept on going, to the back door, through it, over the back fence and home, straight to John Thorpe, and stood before him, his jaws shut tight, his breath coming fast, his face crimson and his eyes uncertain whether to be appealing or defiant.

John Thorpe understood and laughed and drew the boy to his knee, and promised that thenceforth he might do as he liked in matters of the sort. The incident was closed, the promise was kept, the subject was never discussed again between the two.

Ben had fought Sam Bannon not because Sam had done anything to him but because Sam was a bully and made life miserable for those weaker than himself. When Ben saw red and forgot everything that Hackett had ever said and went to his battle, it was because Sam Bannon was torturing a child. That the child was a very good friend of Ben's had little to do with it; he loved little children and little children loved him, that was enough, and in an instant he changed from a peaceful boy to an enraged, ferocious demon.

His love for little children, whatever had put it in him, was akin to the affection he won from older boys. Older boys had tried him and had not found him wanting in courage or in modesty; further, they had discovered that he had, to all appearances, the making of a wonderful athlete in him. No boy of his age was nearly so strong as he; none could run as fast; none could throw and catch a baseball as skilfully as he; none could take the banging of a football game as he did and come up smiling, looking for more; none could swim as swiftly as he; and he had fought such a fight as no Lanville boy had ever fought before and he would say nothing about it.

Therefore the older boys took Ben unto themselves so far as might be, giving him the opportunity to play games with them, coaching him and encouraging him. And so Ben took little children unto himself. He played with them, comforted them, protected them, helped them out of tiny troubles and explained to them many of the mysteries of their youthful lives. Parents saw it all and marveled, but not one of them could find reason for objection or could find anything to complain of in the boy; their children were safe with him.

Through his three years of grammar school Hackett and John Thorpe watched the boy develop. They saw his rough corners polished off, saw the last trace of the old

life vanish, saw him drink in the lessons they taught, saw him rise head and shoulders above his fellows in school and out of it, and they knew that the boy who had come from the slums was no common boy and that the slums had not produced him.

There was no question of his work in school; during the first year he overcame the handicap under which he had started, in the second he pushed forward among the leaders and in the third was undisputed head of his class when everything was considered. He was a very quiet and serious boy, he talked very little and his ability to concentrate on the subject at hand, which had so impressed Hackett from the beginning, became more and more marked.

In the study room he studied, it required almost a riot to distract his attention from his work; he had little interest in the sports of the class room, the passing of notes, the stealing of books and hiding them to the great discomfort of him who had left them unguarded, the placing of bent pins where they would make the most commotion, the perpetration of noises nicely tuned to annoy the teacher without giving evidence to the prosecution.

During recitations he sat for minutes at a time motionless, slumped down in his seat, his eyes fixed on the teacher, with an expression on his face which no teacher quite understood. His attitude toward his teachers was a mild form of torture; try as they would, they could not stir up in him a sign of sympathy or friendship; they felt, they knew, that he was antagonistic to them as no other boy was, though never unruly, as another boy might be.

He had, too, a deep sense of justice that was a sore trial to his women teachers. Their jobs were no beds of roses at best, and it is human to err in all walks of life.

Day after day these young girls fought against the mob,—children who had a far greater love for excitement than for the accumulation of knowledge. They combated constantly with devices to evade work, came face to face with innumerable clever excuses for unlearned lessons and for failure to do home work; it was a battle from morning to night and a woman must have been a marvelous creature indeed if sometimes she did not crack under the strain, lose some of her good nature and calm judgment, and make mistakes in inflicting reprimands and punishments.

Ben had no sympathy for such weakness and many a time took the part of the unjustly treated boy, even though the penalty imposed was not serious and could do little harm and, on general principles, might do much good. No woman likes to have a boy convince her that she has been unjust and has acted without full consideration or knowledge of the facts, and make her, if she would be fair, revoke penalties imposed in a rash moment and with little thought. His teachers believed every such incident to be evidence that Ben hated them, and no woman likes to be hated when she is entirely unable to prove that the hatred is unwarranted. None of them could ever convince Ben of the error of his attitude toward her.

Ben was fifteen when he entered the high school. He was a year over the average age and very much larger than the other boys in his class, much larger even than his greater age would account for. He was six feet tall and weighed one hundred and sixty pounds; his shoulders were very broad, his arms long, his hands huge. Even then his strength was a matter of constant comment and admiration among his fellows. No homelier boy ever existed. His nose was large and out of shape, his mouth large and crooked, his teeth white and nearly

perfect, his chin square and heavy, his eyes dark and very quiet and set far apart, his ears were large and set close to his head, his forehead was high and broad. His face was most unusual, it was a type which denoted courage, intellect, and breeding, it was not a type that is often seen, nor was it a type that originates in the slums. At first glance he appeared to be clumsy and awkward, but he was nothing of the sort; his movements were quick and accurate and he had an inborn skill at sports.

Ben on entering the high school passed from the exclusive control of women into the domain of men and women. Hackett was there; Stewart, an older man and no less able than Hackett, was waiting to teach him the sciences; Arthur Gordon, a lovable, simple old man of a bygone age, presided over his class room. The principal of the school, Rufus Starling, whose heart was soft and who understood and loved boys, had very few years of service left in him and his authority was falling fast on the narrow, sharp shoulders of Jane Dobson, and Jane had not forgotten Ben. She, too, was waiting for him, and she lost no time in putting into effect her determination to make the boy bow before her.

Hardly a month after school opened came his second clash with Jane Dobson.

"Ben Thorpe, you are wanted at the office." Ben knew that probably meant something serious; it was a command well known and well feared by Lanville youth. In this case Ben could not imagine what the trouble was. He found Jane Dobson waiting for him and she led him into the small anteroom known as the torture chamber. She held in her hand a paper which Ben recognized as his latest literary creation; the order had been to write a narrative and Ben had written a narrative with a vengeance,—a fearful and wonderful creation. To begin with, a murder was committed; the wrong man was convicted

and sent to the electric chair; the electric chair did a rotten job, for the victim's body was taken away by his friends and brought back to life, as good as ever. After a strenuous time the hero succeeded in proving that, though he was legally dead, he was actually very much alive and entirely innocent. There were endless complications and ramifications; there was enough material crowded into those half-dozen pages to make a half-dozen vivid dime novels.

For some reason known only to herself, Jane Dobson chose to take the thing seriously. Instead of explaining to the boy the futility of such ideas, she assailed the facts, she accused him of a criminal tendency, of having a cross in his moral character, and of very nearly all the sins in the calendar. Ben was completely taken by surprise, but as the tirade continued he appreciated that at best she was making a mountain out of a mole-hill. As a matter of fact, the idea of the story had been suggested to him, unknowingly, by John Thorpe. A murder had been committed—the papers had been full of it,—and the murderer electrocuted. The electric chair was a comparatively new device and it had been suggested that it did not kill but simply suspended life, which might be restored. John Thorpe had discussed the idea casually with a friend, the question of whether in such a case the soul left the body and returned later affording some interest, and Ben had overheard the conversation.

Jane Dobson's castigation fell flat, but it set his old hatred of her aflame, it made him swear that he would, some day, wreak vengeance upon the "Mouse." Of course the great weakness of the Mouse's position was that when she ran out of breath there was an end to the whole thing. She could n't send the boy to jail, she could n't even make him leave the school. She saw an expression of utter contempt for her come over his face,

instead of the fear and remorse that she had hoped to see. She knew that he was stronger than she, and when she sent him away, smiling that smile of his, she knew that she had failed again and that he knew it. She knew that there was war to the death between them.

Jane Dobson's vindictiveness had swept away such good judgment as she may have had. Her authority and power had never been questioned by pupils or teachers, her ability to make the bravest tremble before her glance had been her most valuable possession. She knew that Ben Thorpe neither respected her authority nor feared her in the least degree, and she was frightened. Just as Sam Bannon, urged on by fear rather than courage, had gone to his fate, so Jane Dobson rushed on to disaster.

Finally, in Ben's third year in the high school, they laid aside all pretense and put their cards on the table. Ben had had a recitation under Arthur Gordon and they had been having a delightful discussion when the hour closed.

"Have you a class next hour?" Gordon asked, and Ben said that he had not. "Then meet me in the recitation room across the hall and I'll explain this to you."

Ben went to the small room and waited. Jane Dobson, passing, saw him standing alone and doing nothing. His being there was a breach of her rules, his place was in the study room. She went in, her face severe as only hers could be. Ben turned and faced her, and a very hazy suspicion of a smile came to his lips.

"Why are you here?" she asked, and she said perfectly plainly that by no possible chance should he have been there, that he was breaking rules and that he'd be very lucky if he escaped with nothing more than a severe reprimand.

"Mr. Gordon told me to wait here for him."

She raised her eyebrows, indicating to Ben that she knew he was lying, though she was afraid to say so like

a man. Why she should have acted so passes all comprehension, for she knew that he was not a boy who would lie. Perhaps she was the victim of long and strong habit. Then Ben smiled, a broad, unquestionable smile, and the woman grasped at a straw.

"Why are you laughing, sir?" she demanded. Ben did not answer, but his smile remained.

"Tell me why you are smiling," she repeated.

"If I do, you will tell me that I am impertinent."

"You *are* impertinent."

"No," he said, "I am only amused."

"Indeed! And what, pray, do you find so amusing?"

"Your disappointment."

The woman flushed. "How dare you speak that way to me, sir?"

"I'm only telling the truth. You wanted to catch me doing something you could punish me for and you were disappointed when you did n't. You acted as though I had lied, but you did n't dare say so." Ben smiled. "I'm not afraid of you," he said, and at that moment Mr. Gordon entered the room. The woman turned and went out, leaving Ben with his smile. He never heard of the incident again and he knew that the victory had been his.

The final incident in his conflict with Jane Dobson came in his last year in the high school. Ben, advanced beyond his class in mathematics, had studied algebra under a girl, Clara Wood, fresh from college. To her mathematics was a closed book, the figures and letters and signs were figures and letters and signs which, juggled in accordance with fixed rules that she knew by heart, produced certain results, which being in the figures of everyday commerce were reasonably intelligible. She had no more real knowledge of the subject or inspiration in her than a fly; she hated algebra and all mathematics from the bottom of her heart.

Ben had floundered about in the course, making no headway till he told Mr. Hackett about it and Hackett, in the late hour of the afternoons, straightened him out so well, made the subject so simple, made its fundamental principles so clear, that Ben soon knew more about algebra than Clara Wood herself. The poor girl had no business teaching algebra, she was filling in in an emergency and loathed the work, but Ben did n't know that and it would have made little difference if he had. The whole thing was simply further evidence of the uselessness of women; he despised Clara Wood and made no attempt to conceal it. At the end of the half-year they parted company, to meet again two years later, with the memory of her fiasco still clear in Ben's mind.

"English Composition" brought about their meeting. The writing of English had always been difficult for Ben, but he had struggled on with very little success. By chance his compositions, for the first two months of his last year, went to Hackett for correction and criticism. On the first one he received ninety-four per cent. and on three others a point or two above or below that. John Thorpe was pleased and Ben was surprised. Ben, Hackett's best student in mathematics, wondered whether it was because Hackett was prepossessed in his favor or whether his work was really better. Then four of his literary efforts went to a woman whom Ben hardly knew and the good marks continued. Of course the system was very nearly idiotic at best. To say that a boy's composition was within five per cent. or fifty per cent. of being perfect left something to the imagination, to say the least, but since that was the system there should undoubtedly have been some consistency about it.

Clara Wood took up the burden for the third set of four compositions and the first she marked seventy-five per cent. Ben demanded an explanation and was shown

the weakness of his effort, but he got no explanation of the sudden drop of twenty points; so far as he could see that composition was no worse than the ones that had been marked above ninety. He worked hard on the second and got seventy per cent. for his pains. For the third, a description, he copied word for word a masterpiece of English and it came back with more red ink corrections on it than there was original copy. At the bottom was the comment: "You have jumbled together a lot of words of which you apparently do not know the meaning." Outside, also in red ink, was marked "72%."

Ben waited till the others had left the class room and then walked to Clara Wood's desk. He laid the paper before her. "I did not write that," he said.

"You—you—I don't understand."

"I did not write that, Ruskin wrote it."

"You mean that you handed in something as your own work that was not your own?"

"Yes, I had no intention of claiming it. I told half a dozen of the fellows so that there would n't be any question of that."

"You would do a thing like that to me?"

"It has nothing to do with you personally. There was something wrong somewhere and I wanted to find out what it was. I won't worry any more about the marks you give me, that's all. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to tell any one about it, I won't even tell the fellows what happened." Clara Wood walked out of the room, hiding her tears.

Ben was not quite truthful when he said that he would not worry about those marks. A gold medal was given to the pupil having the highest average percentage in all the work of the year and he knew that those marks of Clara Wood's would probably make him lose it. He had

sworn that he would take that gold medal home to John Thorpe.

The subject was resumed a week later, very unexpectedly. The whole school was assembled for singing and a chorus was to be selected for the commencement exercises. Twice before Ben had been selected for this chorus, possibly because of his size, and both times dropped immediately, with the admission on both sides that he had no ear for music. Again a woman started the trouble, for the teacher asked Ben to stand up and have his voice tried. He laughed. "It's just the same as it used to be," he said.

"Never mind, Thorpe, let's hear it." He shook his head.

"Thorpe, stand up." He arose. "Now," and she gave him some notes.

Again he shook his head. "It's no use, I can't sing and I'd rather not try."

"Thorpe!" Silent-footed Jane Dobson was standing in the doorway behind him. "Come with me at once, sir!"

And the devil in him burst into laughter. The whole school laughed, not at him but with him. Miss Dobson glared, but the laughter would not stop. A few minutes later Ben was in the private torture chamber, a room he had not visited since the incident of the electric chair.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" It was the well-worn phrase.

The boy grinned.

"I am not surprised at your conduct," she said. "It is typical of your actions."

"I have n't much of a voice, you know," he said meekly.

"That is no reason for behaving as you did."

There was no arguing that. "I know it; I'll apologize to Miss Manners."

That took the wind out of Jane's sails, but she had a hurricane in reserve.

"I have something else to speak to you about."

She had him now, at last, after years of waiting, and she was going to make the most of it. Ben had no idea what was coming; he never thought of Ruskin.

"Miss Wood tells me that you have copied work and handed it in as your own."

Oh, very well! very well! he had heard that before. Go on! Go on!

"That shows you are a criminal, that you have a cross in your moral character." There was that same old cross again.

"I would n't say that if I were you."

"What! You dare to tell me what I shall say!"

"If you were a man you would n't dare say it."

"Stop! I won't have such language."

"Neither will I. What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to write your father." Again habit asserted itself.

"Is that all?" He was goading her on.

"No, that is not all. I shall place it before the Board of Education. You will be dismissed from the school."

"You mean that, really?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Would you be fool enough to do that?"

The woman looked at the boy. There was no smile on his face now but a sort of surprised fury.

"Are you fool enough for that?" he repeated.

It was no longer pupil and teacher, but man and woman, and it was a fight to a finish. She did not answer him, but her heart quailed.

"Then do it and see what happens." He walked to the door, turned the key, and put it in his pocket.

"It is the best thing that could possibly happen. I've

stood all I shall from you, I've been waiting for chance. I hate you. The school hates you. The boys will laugh at you, every one will laugh at you, and you know what will happen to you when they do! You've tried to run things by being smart, and sneering, and punishing everybody. Why don't you let us behave the way Mr. Stewart and Mr. Hackett do—being decent yourself? You can't. You're a bluff; you can't bluff me. Go before the board and every one will laugh at you and Miss Wood and you'll hear things that will do you good."

The woman was sitting beside a table. She knew what Ben called her a fool that the end had come, that she had been beaten, that her cheap bluff had been called. As he spoke she gazed at him, and whatever courage she had found in her departed and left nothing but the weakness of a woman. She threw her arms across the table, her head fell on her arms and she burst into tears. Ben looked on and cried. He walked to a chair, sat down, and waited. Finally she got up and, hiding her face, went to the door.

"You can't get out," he said, "and I'm not through yet. She turned and faced him.

"Have n't you said enough?"

"I have, but you have n't. Suppose you get this nigger cross business and my being a criminal out of your head."

"I'm sorry I said that."

"I don't care whether you are sorry or not. Say it again so."

"I know it is n't so."

"After this, think a little before you say things like that."

"Oh, Ben, I'm—I'm—"

He unlocked the door and opened it. "You're a coward. If you change your mind about the board, let me know. And he walked out.

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was the best kid punter, pitcher, batter, and all-round boy he had seen in a coon's age and was bound to be a wonder in college. Emissaries came and talked things over with Ben, not only from Conley's college but other colleges, explaining to him the attractions and advantages of their alma maters, but Ben was adamant. They stood no chance against Hackett.

The gold medal went by the board. Clara Wood's marks stood and they were enough to permit Florence Earle to win the coveted trophy by a very small fraction of one per cent. John Thorpe thought nothing of it, it being in his opinion a thing of little importance. Ben laughed when the announcement was made, it was all in the day's work, but deep down in his heart the injustice of it rankled. And as usual when things went wrong, there was a woman at the bottom of it.

After the Ruskin episode Clara Wood had marked his work up in the nineties, which disgusted Ben; she did n't have even the courage of her convictions. She ignored Ben in the class room, she never said anything to him about his compositions, letting her red ink do the work for her.

Late one afternoon he went into the school library for a book. He was wearing rubber-soled shoes and made no sound; he turned a corner and came upon Clara Wood, alone at a table, her face buried in her hands, crying. It was a pathetic spectacle,—a pretty young girl sobbing as though her heart would break. There was n't much wrong, really. She had never been designed to stand the strain of teaching a lot of wild Indians, she was not brilliant, she hated the work, she wanted to marry and be taken care of; it had been a long, hard year, she was tired out, her nerves were in shreds and there all alone in a corner of the library she was having a good cry.

Ben saw her and stopped and she looked up, and the

color came into her wet cheeks. She dabbed her tiny handkerchief over her face and smiled. The smile suggested some sort of courage.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

She laughed at that. "There is n't any trouble at all. I was just very tired and I cry sometimes when I'm tired; it makes me feel better."

Ben turned to go, but she called him back. "I want to speak to you a minute." He came and stood beside her. "I'm sorry about—about your composition. I don't think I treated you fairly, though I did n't mean to be unfair. Will you forgive me?"

He had promised her that he would tell no one of what she had done, but she had told Jane Dobson what he had done. Why had she done that unless she had hoped that Jane would inflict punishment that she herself could not inflict? And now, when he had beaten her and Jane Dobson, she was being sweet and asking to be forgiven. How queer, how underhand women were!

His face hardened and he gazed past her, out through the window.

"Won't you forgive me, Ben?" she asked again and she took his hand in hers. Ben looked down at her, down into her big brown eyes that were dry now and were raised to his, down at her red lips and her blushing cheeks. He knew much of women; he had known much of them when he was twelve and had never forgotten it. He was nineteen now and women were talked about in one way or another by his friends.

The girl was pretty, she was small, her black hair was close to him: Ben smiled, there was adventure near by, it would be amusing. He raised the hand which was not in hers and laid it on her hair and she made no objection. He let his fingers run downward to her forehead, to her cheeks, they touched her eyelids and she smiled, he took

both her hands in his and she did not resist, he drew her upward and she came willingly, he put his arm around her and her head sank to his shoulder; he waited a moment and then pressed her head back and she smiled up at him, he bent down and kissed her cheek, her arms went about his neck and drew him close to her, he kissed her lips; she clung to him. Her breath came quick, in gasps, and she pressed his hand closer. It had not been done quickly; it had been a slow, methodical, and successful experiment.

Ben was nineteen, she was twenty-four. Ben had never kissed a woman before, but she had been kissed before, many times; he was only a boy, but he was big and strong, she was slender and small, and lonely; she taught him how the thing can be done, how it should be done, and he learned quickly.

They stayed there an hour.

"Look at my hair!" She set about tidying up as best she could.

"Good-by." Another quick kiss and she was gone. He went the other way. It had been good fun, it was a new game, a fine game. That was what women were for, —but how he despised her!

The next day he saw her eyes on him, and saw an appeal in them that he did not understand. Was she imploring for secrecy or was she crying for more kisses? He found out quickly enough, for she met him in the hall.

"Will you come and see me to-night?" she asked. He nodded and she told him where to meet her and at what time. They took a walk, in the woods. At first she talked on serious subjects, almost pedantically. The incident of the library was apparently forgotten, at least it was not to be referred to nor repeated. She harped on various phases of morality and high thinking, assuming

something of the rather frigid air of her school-room presence.


Ben listened to her and said just enough to keep her talking; he agreed with her platitudes, let her be sanctimonious to her heart's content. When they were safely in the woods he put his arm about her waist and kissed her. She struggled valiantly and protested, straining away from him. When he let her go she hid her face in her hands and sobbed, "Oh, Ben, how could you?"

He comforted her by holding her hand and patting her hair; she allowed her hands, with her face in them, to rest on his breast. She found a handkerchief and dabbed it at her eyes, with his arm around her. He kissed her again and she murmured, while she held her lips to his, "Oh, Ben, you must n't; please don't, please don't."

The woman had two distinct personalities, one for the school-room—cold, heartless, conventional—another for such moments as this, when the shell of her professional existence fell from her, baring the most elemental, weak woman beneath. Never had she been designed for a teacher, never fashioned to bear the burden she had been forced to assume. She was acting a part, day after day, that was far too heavy for her.

She wanted a change and got it. Instead of admitting it, she protested till even she knew that her protests were nonsensical. Then she let Ben kiss her as much as he wished. She liked it, it was like cool water to a man dying of thirst; it soothed her nerves, made her forget her troubles.

If she had been honest about it she would have had nothing to regret; girls have been kissed since the world began and always will be. But, on the way home, when more kissing was impossible, she tried to explain how very wrong it all was and that they must never do it



again. Nevertheless they went to the woods again, twice.

The last time Ben was bored; he kissed her two or three times, ran his fingers over the skin of her throat and neck and shoulders and had had enough. He was sorry that he had come. The woman understood and tried to win him back to her.

He hated her, despised her; his hatred of women gripped him. He pushed her away from him.

"Don't be a fool," he cried.

He led her out of the woods and to her house and left her there. He had had his adventure and was disgusted with it.


She did not sleep that night, perhaps because of shame. She went away later and Ben never saw her again. She was married in the autumn.

It was after he had broken with Clara Wood that, one morning, his last summons to the office came. This time it was not Jane Dobson but Rufus Starling who was waiting for him.

"Thorpe," he said, "you have been chosen valedictorian of your class." The news was unexpected, but no smile came on Ben's face. "Aren't you glad?" Starling asked.

"Why not Ham Jones? His marks are as good as mine for the four years."

"Yes, I know. It was a close thing, but other things than marks were taken into consideration. You have been a hard boy to teach, a hard boy to discipline,—a very hard boy to discipline,—but you've done more than any boy in your class. You had a bad start and a hard time. The board has decided that you are entitled to the honor. I congratulate you and I warn you not to take it too seriously; you are very young yet."



"Don't fear, Mr. Starling, I won't. What do I do now?"

"Go on as usual, see Miss Dobson and arrange with her for your address. You will speak for the class at commencement."

The boy gazed into the man's eyes, turning the matter over in his mind. He would not go to Jane Dobson and work with her. "I'll not speak, I think, if you don't mind," he said.

The principal's heart sank; he had feared something of the sort and, it having come, he feared the boy.

"Oh, yes, Ben, you must speak, you know."

"I'll talk to Father about it, but I don't think I'll speak."

Rufus Starling looked forward to a fine row with the board. There was no use arguing with the boy. If he made up his mind not to speak, nothing in heaven or on earth could make him do it."


"Ben, you will not do it for me?" It was a forlorn appeal.

"I'd like to do it for you, sir, if I could, but I can't speak. It's nonsense, I have nothing to say. People only come because they feel they ought to; I've heard them talk about that sort of thing and laugh at it."

That night the boy spoke to John Thorpe about it.

"Do as you will, lad. You're right and you're wrong. I'll stand by you either way."

"John! Of course he should speak! I'm sure it's a great honor. He must," Mrs. Thorpe exclaimed. It was the old story of a woman everlastingly trying to interfere and make trouble. The boy understood; he knew that it would give her a fine chance to gloat over Mrs. Jones and other mothers in Lanville, who had hoped that the honor would come to their sons.



"I 'll not speak," he said to John Thorpe, ignoring the woman.

And they had to make the best of it,—board, principal, class, and Mrs. Thorpe.

Ben did not speak and not only that but when commencement night came and the church was crowded and the graduating class was there arrayed in its finest, Ben was on a hilltop, far, far from the fuss and feathers of the graduating exercises.

CHAPTER IV

BEN took his final examinations for Harvard in New York early in July. The first day, at noon, while he was going downstairs on his way to lunch, a boy spoke to him:

"Is n't your name Thorpe?"

Ben said it was and that he had seen the other before, but could n't remember his name.

"Lee. I played left field for Blaine School. You struck me out three times."

That was sufficient introduction and they went to a quick-lunch restaurant together and talked things over. There was plenty to talk about. Austen Lee lived in Alden, he was spending the summer on Long Island, he had been to Blaine School for two years, he liked football better than baseball and played it better, his father was a doctor, he had three sisters and two brothers.

He did not of course tell Ben that his family was very rich, that his father was a noted surgeon, that his mother had been an Austen, that they were of the élite of the great city of Alden by their own right and by heritage. The boy never thought of those things himself, nor cared whether any one knew them or not. He was an aristocrat, but before that he was a democrat,—a modest, well-mannered, generous, kind-hearted, simple boy.

Ben told him what there was to tell of himself, which was very little; there was nothing in the small country town of Lanville or in Ben's life there to interest a boy

who had been to Blaine School, who lived in a city like Alden, and who spent the summer on Long Island.

Each understood instinctively what manner of boy the other was, and each picked his way warily into the other's confidence. Four years of association lay before them, years in which they would have much the same interests and the same ambitions, four years during which, if their hopes of success in athletics were realized, they would spend many hours together, and the thought of that quickly formed a bond between them. Besides that, each one had known at sight that he would like the other. When the examinations were over their friendship was on a firm basis.

They were about to say good-by when Austen asked Ben if he would come to see him on Long Island. Ben was taken by surprise. "Yes, I'd like to, sometime," he said.

"I'll let you know. I'll arrange it with Mother. When would suit you best?"

Ben confessed that any time would suit him.

The definite invitation came promptly, for three days late in July, and Ben went into a brand-new world. Seven years before he had left poverty and filth in New York and gone had gone to Lanville; now he went from Lanville to Millhampton. The first journey had been revolutionary and accomplished in a dream, there he had had everything to gain and nothing to lose, nothing had been expected of him, those about him had understood and made allowances for him, Thorpe and Hackett had guided his every step.

The conditions were very different now. There was no such difference between the Lees and the Thorpes as there had been between the Thorpes and the two women in New York, but Ben went to Millhampton under conditions far different from those under which he had gone

to Lanville; no excuses would be made for him at the Lees', it would be taken for granted that he was their sort and he would be treated accordingly. It was, in a way, an adventure, this journeying into a new world, among a sort of people that did not exist in Lanville,—not better people, perhaps, but different people. Ben understood it all clearly enough. Austen Lee had given him an inkling of it in his letter when he had said, "Don't bother to bring dinner clothes, we don't wear them." Ben had no dinner clothes; no boy in Lanville had, or needed them.

He arrived late on a Thursday afternoon and Austen met him at the station and drove him to the big gray-shingled cottage. A man took his bag and led him to his room; Austen followed and explained things and said that there was no hurry, dinner was at seven.

Ben unpacked his bag, bathed, and talked to Austen, who sat with his feet on the corner of a table and smoked his pipe.

"Are you ready for dinner?" Ben asked that in his underclothes. Austen nodded and Ben laughed. "This is the first time I've ever been away from Lanville," he said, and then added, "since I was twelve,—except I've been to hotels in the summer, on Father's vacations. You did n't know the treat you were giving me, did you?"

"Honestly?" For an instant Austen was amazed, but he quickly understood both how such a thing could be and Ben's reason for speaking of it. "Millhampton's a pretty good place," he said. "There are lots of nice people here and there's plenty to do. I hope you'll like it. Do you play tennis?"

"I do," Ben said, "and I feel as though I were off on a wonderful adventure."

Thus, slowly, the two boys worked out their mutual understanding.

They went downstairs and for the first time in his life Ben met a woman who was, if the word means anything at all, a lady. Mrs. Lee was the mother of six children, and her spirit was as young as theirs; she was a simple, gentle, broad-minded woman, straightforward and sweet, a woman of infinite understanding and tact, whose heart was kind, whose manner was charming; and she knew boys and girls through and through. She greeted Ben with a smile. A little girl came into the room. "And this is my daughter, Hope." The ten-year-old girl held out her hand and her big brown eyes gazed up at Ben.

There followed Mary, who was seventeen and a beauty, and greeted Ben with a simple "Hello," and Elizabeth, who was fifteen and rather dignified, and John, who was twelve and certainly not in condition to appear at dinner, but who remedied said condition with remarkable speed. Ben learned that Francis, the eldest Lee, was not at home.

Dinner was, in itself, a simple enough affair; even the man-servant who had taken Ben's bag seemed to fit into the scheme of things without causing any commotion, and the maid who followed him about did not complicate matters. The only trouble was Mary, who sat across the table and talked a great deal about social matters, dress, and the affairs of the younger set and plied Ben with questions as to his opinions on various subjects of which he knew little or nothing. Elizabeth told her not to be silly, but Mary was used to that and paid no attention. Hope, next to Ben, spoke hardly at all but listened and ate and looked up at Ben, smiling.

Finally Mary, becoming desperate, put a flippanant question to Ben: "Do you like girls?"

Austen saved the situation. "Ask her if she likes boys," he said. "She 's nutty about them."

"Austen!" Mrs. Lee uttered a mild protest, Austen laughed, and the original question was forgotten. Ben did not like Mary.

On the piazza after dinner Hope said good night with her hand in Ben's. She hesitated, blinked her eyes, stood on tiptoe, and kissed Ben's cheek.

Mary was restless and suggested that they go to see Helen Mitchell. Austen was rather fond of Helen, as Ben discovered later on, and thought the idea a good one. They went and played euchre—it was before the days of bridge. All through the evening Mary grated on Ben's nerves, he had never known a girl like her. She was not quite like the other Lees. She had a strong desire to shine among her comrades, to know the smartest thing in clothes and phrases, to have boys worship her, and be able to treat them with a subtle disdain and still keep them at her feet. Her mind was keen, her place sure; she would undoubtedly shoot through the next half-dozen years in a blaze of glory and then marry and settle down and become what she was at heart, a good, clean-minded, honest girl, fundamentally very much like her mother. But Ben could foresee no such probability and Mary, who had never known an unsophisticated country boy before, was a little cruel.

When they were alone in Ben's room Austen said, "Do you want to go to a dance at the club Saturday night?" He had a suspicion that Ben might not want to go, and there was some planning to be done.

"I've never danced in my life," Ben answered.

Austen thought that was a great joke; they were far enough along to josh one another a little. "Don't they dance in Lanville?" he asked.

"Sure they do, but somehow I never tried it."

"Woman-hater!" laughed Austen. "Why don't you like girls?"

Ben dodged the issue. "Somehow I could never see much in dressing up and working like a dog in a hot room," he said.

Austen understood; he took it for granted that it was a temporary idiosyncrasy and was tactful about it. He had seen that Mary made Ben uncomfortable during the evening.

The next morning Austen found two other boys and they played tennis and then went to the beach for swimming. On the way home Mary suggested a sail for the afternoon, to a place where things to eat could be had, and the idea met with general approval. Hope asked if she might go and there was a question raised about that. It was discussed further at lunch and Ben took her part and she went. Mary had noticed that the boys approved of Ben, she had a sharp eye for that sort of thing; she had seen him play tennis, swim, and play ball on the beach and his skill and strength had appealed to her. Austen, before Ben came, had talked a little about his prowess, and another boy had lauded him to the skies, and she had as a result expected to find him worth while. She had tried to goad him into enthusiasm for her, a well-known trick of hers, to be followed by a smile and a kind word.

The time for the smile and kind word had not come and she was honestly disappointed. He was rather stupid and a good deal of a boor, he was not exactly her sort. She wondered why Austen had asked him to Millhampton and why he seemed to like him so much. But there was, underlying it all, a feeling that something lay behind that ugly grim face of his.

Of course Mary was very young and very inexperienced and her ideas were not to be taken too seriously, but before the sail was over that afternoon her disappointment lay not so much in finding Ben unpleasant as

in not being able to attract him. Ben spent almost the entire afternoon talking with Hope. The little girl with the big brown eyes, who did n't talk very much, but smiled instead, opened her heart and sang the story of all her small affairs to Ben and was in heaven.

That night Dr. Lee came and when he greeted Ben he took his hand and held him at arm's length. "So you're the young athlete I've been hearing so much about, are you?" he said, and he pinched Ben's arm and looked him over carefully. "You're going to be quite a big boy when you grow up." There was good humor in his voice and Ben grinned. Just as the son had attracted him, so the father did. And, too, exactly as John Thorpe had been fascinated by the boy seven years before, so was Dr. Lee fascinated now. While he had been speaking of Ben's physique and feeling of his arm, he had been looking at the boy's face. He knew men, he had known a great many men and often their innermost secrets, he read faces with almost unerring accuracy. He had expected to find a big, awkward, good-hearted, small-town boy, a boy, perhaps, with more than an ordinary intellect; but the moment he saw Ben he knew instinctively that here was something very different from what he had expected.

He went upstairs to dress and while he dressed he said to himself that it was curious that such a boy should come from Lanville, and from such people. Austen had told him what Ben had said about his life there.

"Who the devil does he look like?" he mused. "I've seen that face before, it's a most unusual type." But Dr. Lee could n't recall that other face, though he tried hard to do it. He went downstairs and found Mary talking rapidly and rather aimlessly to no one in particular. Ben and Hope were chatting together on the piazza steps. At dinner he watched Ben, just as John Thorpe had watched him in the Spuyten Duyvil yard seven years

before; he saw Ben watching Mary in much the same way a man may watch a dangerous animal when he is not afraid of it but keeps an eye on it to be ready in case it should take it into its head to kick or bite or scratch, depending on its nature. He saw a curious expression, a sort of hardening of his features, when Mary spoke to him; and he saw just the reverse when Mrs. Lee spoke. He noticed that when Ben spoke it was with an effort, not to find something to say but not to say too much. Dr. Lee had seen small-town country boys before and Austen had told him that this was Ben's first visit away from Lanville; he would not have been surprised to find Ben ill at ease, notwithstanding that he knew that his wife and Austen would do all in their power to make the boy's path smooth and that their ability along those lines was great.

He saw, instead, a boy who was above all else courageous and determined. Ben made no effort to show that he was quite at home in the Lees' house, that there was nothing for him to learn; he was frank, he was learning things which he wanted to know, but not to have known them before was no disgrace. He was like a stranger in a city asking to be directed to his destination. When he had gone to John Thorpe's house he had kept his mouth shut and his eyes open, now he was keeping his mouth nearly as tight shut and his ears open.

During dinner Dr. Lee asked Austen if he and Ben would like a day's golf at Shinnecock on Saturday, adding that Judge Moore would play with them. Lanville had its golf-course, a tiny affair with an old barn for a club-house, and Ben had played a great deal in the summers and on Saturdays when there was no baseball or football. The idea of playing on a real course appealed to him greatly and it was arranged.

After dinner, with sleep calling him loudly, Ben sank into a deep wicker chair. Hope, with something very important to tell him, came and sat on the arm of it and, the important thing told, stayed there for a moment and then, inch by inch, advanced inward and downward till she was curled up in Ben's arms, where she remained until she was sent bedward, reluctantly. Mary was in no wise jealous of Ben's arms, but she was jealous of her baby sister who in some mysterious way had won Ben's affection while she had not been able even to rouse his interest. Making boys become her slaves was the game of games for her and losing she disliked emphatically. She came to the conclusion during the evening that her strategy had been poor, and she decided to change her tactics.

Dr. Lee, Judge Moore, and the two boys played golf all day Saturday; they played with great enthusiasm but with little proficiency, which was not surprising, for golf was in its infancy in those days and the old solid ball was hard to handle.

Dr. Lee told Judge Moore who Ben was. "He appeals to me," he said. "I don't know when I've run across a boy who has impressed me so much. Tell me what you think of him."

There is a curious, indescribable quality of manhood which appeals strongly to other men; it begins with physical strength and control over it; it runs on through good nature, determination, courage, and courtesy, and it ends with modesty. One who has that quality seldom does or says anything which irritates or displeases his companions, however well or little he may know them; instead he brings smiles on their lips, there is something at once soothing and exhilarating about him, he is a good fellow without the good fellow's hypocrisy.

Dr. Lee and Judge Moore were well along in years

and Ben was a raw boy, yet both of the men recognized that quality in him. They spoke about him when they were alone at the end of the day.

"Nice boy," Judge Moore said. His adjective left something to the imagination and he continued: "Quite an unusual boy, I should say; he has a remarkable personality,—force and ambition."

Dr. Lee nodded. "He has some sort of devil in him and it's a real devil, too, or I'm mistaken; I'm inclined to think he'll make it work for him." Hackett, years before, had spoken to John Thorpe about the devil that was in Ben, the one which, considering his early life, was a pretty good devil. "He reminds me of some one, and I can't remember who it is. At first it was his face and then it was that way he has of looking at you as though he were going to say something and not doing it; you understand his thoughts from his expression."

Judge Moore smiled. "How about Lloyd Rossiter?" he asked.

"That's the man!" Dr. Lee exclaimed and then he laughed. "I knew I'd seen that face somewhere before. I wonder who Rossiter was, what stock he came of; if I ever knew I've forgotten."

Judge Moore was not sure, but he thought the Rossiters had been more or less commonplace people. "That's where the great men of the country come from," he said. "My father was a gentleman's gardener, which proves it."

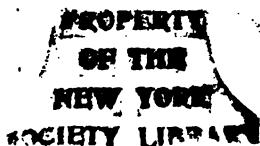
That night Dr. Lee talked with Ben, alone, going to some trouble to make the opportunity. He went at it diplomatically, asking him questions about his school life, his athletics, his ideas of college, why he had chosen Harvard, his ambitions and so on and on. He succeeded in making Ben talk and in the end Ben told him that he was not a Thorpe except by leave of the law and through the kindness of his foster-father.

"I know that it is so," he said, "but I don't think it makes any difference. I don't believe that any real father could treat a boy better than my father has treated me. He adopted me when I was twelve, when I guess I was in a fair way of going to the dogs. I want to make good because he wants me to; I'd rather make him happy than anything in the world."

Later that night Dr. Lee realized that Ben had said nothing of Mrs. Thorpe, or of who he had been before he became a Thorpe.

In the meantime Mary was dancing at the Millhampton Club. She had been entirely frank when Ben told her that he did not dance and let her understand, none too subtly, that he was glad he did n't. Not to be able to dance was, in her eyes, disgraceful, and not to want to was quite as bad, especially when one might dance with her,—when one had, in fact, a certain right to her above that of others because he was staying at her house. She went off a little disdainfully, but knowing full well that Ben was glad that he was not going with her. She hated him. If she had not been quite so young or had been a little more philosophical she would have known that in hating him she was paying him quite the highest compliment of which she was capable. She had never really hated any one before.

She had had little opportunity then to try out her new tactics on him since she had made her resolution, but she began bright and early Sunday morning. At breakfast she dropped her goading, the subtle conveyance to him of her opinion that he was a stick, and switched to flattery that was hardly subtle, and immediately made a mistake. Her insincerity jarred on Ben. She did not know that and was as sweet to him during the meal as she knew how to be. After breakfast she managed to get



Ben alone and went straight to the subject that was on her mind:

"Don't you like girls at all, or don't you just like me?" she asked, and her voice and eyes were full to overflowing with what she thought would melt the coldest of masculine hearts.

Ben was not deceived, he knew that she was playing a game. "That's an awfully silly question," he said.

"Why is it silly?" she demanded. "You've been horrid to me and you would n't go to the dance last night. I don't believe you can't dance." Ben said nothing to that, but smiled at her. "Can you?" she asked.

"No, I can't."

"Have n't you learned because you don't like girls? It's awfully easy to learn and you'd dance beautifully, I'm sure, if you'd only try. You do everything else awfully well. Austen says you're the best athlete in any of the prep schools and that you're sure to do wonderfully at Harvard."

That flattery was too much for Ben, it drove the original question out of his head and left him uncomfortable and blushing a little under his tan. He had a wild desire to tell Mary that she was a fool and leave her, but he knew that he could n't do that.

"You like to tease, don't you?" he said.

"No, I don't, but I don't like men to be old bears. You *are* a woman-hater, are n't you?" She rather thought men liked to be called woman-haters.

"I don't believe I am. I've never known a girl like you before."

"How am I different from other girls?"

"Perhaps you're not. I've never known any girls very well. Perhaps I ought to have said that you are n't like the girls in Lanville."

"What kind of place is Lanville?"

"Just a little country village on the Hudson, and I've only known country girls. I don't understand you at all; maybe that's why you frighten me so."

"I don't think I'm hard to understand, at all."

Ben looked at her intently for an instant and smiled. "Neither do I," he said, and Mary knew that this time he was telling the truth, and the color rushed to her cheeks. Her flattery had not worked and she had been caught red-handed. She tried to hide her confusion by saying: "If you won't be nice I can't make you." Then with all the injured innocence she could summon to her aid she walked away, and she ignored Ben, so far as she could, for the rest of the day.

That night Austen made the astounding suggestion to Ben that he spend a month with the Lees at Millhampton. "You and I'll have to double up, but that won't make any difference," he said, and then he added: "I was going to ask Father and Mother if you could come, but they beat me to it. This afternoon Father asked me if I would n't like to have you."

Of course Ben would like nothing so much, but he would have to talk it over with his father, and the two boys left it that way, with the dates fixed if Ben could come at all. Mrs. Lee spoke to him about it, telling him how much she hoped he would come, and Ben did his best to thank her, feeling that he was making a sorry mess of it. Mrs. Lee was different from any woman he had ever known,—very, very different. The fact he understood well enough, but he did not quite understand wherein the difference lay. For the first time he had toward her, a woman, the same feeling that he had toward men he liked. There was a curious attraction about her; he liked to talk with her, he liked to watch her, to see her smile, to listen to her voice; he had a

respect for her that he had never had before, even for men.

John Thorpe would not listen to Ben's protests against leaving him for a month. "Go, boy," he said, "and be thankful for the chance. It will be good for you; you'll get to know the sort of people you'll find at college and that you'll want to know after college. You'll not stay in Lanville all your life, or I'm mistaken. It's a good enough place for me but you'll go further than I've ever gone, or ever wanted to go. I started at the bottom and I've done well enough, but I know what it means to get an education and be among the right people. You'll start where I leave off and go on, higher up, just as I'd have you do if you were my own son; you'll be a great disappointment to me otherwise. Go to the Lees' and have a good time, and you'll get more out of it than a good time."

Ben went. Mrs. Lee told him that he was to be one of the family, that he was to do what he pleased, and that he was not to be late for meals except in extraordinary cases, which would be overlooked.

"Mother's a strict disciplinarian," Austen said, "but she's not so bad when you know how to manage her."

"I'm entirely too easy to manage," Mrs. Lee said. "Some day I'm going to rise up and—and—well, you wait and see."

Dr. Lee was there and he took a vast interest in his children; he played golf with Ben and Austen, and sailed and swam.

Mary, repulsed on Ben's first visit, struggled on, trying all her tricks and guiles on him. She confessed to herself, eventually, that Ben was different from any boy she had ever known and that the difference was all in Ben's favor, and fell in love with him, with all the ardor

and romance of her seventeen years. She enjoyed her martyrdom to the full and suffered exquisitely and happily in silence, letting her dreams of ultimate victory completely overshadow the practical consideration that Ben did n't care a snap of his fingers for her. She knew that it was not a pose, she knew that not only did he not like her but he had no use for any of the girls; she knew that he evaded them whenever he could, without being absolutely rude, and when he could n't evade them and was, therefore, with them, she knew that he was nervous and ill at ease and anxious to get away.

She took good care not to show her jealousy of Hope. Ben liked Hope, they played together a great deal, he even taught her to swim and dive and to play tennis. Hope worshiped the ground he walked on and made no bones about it.

Mary's first really serious love-affair, or perhaps it would be better to say half love-affair, did n't last long. She was no fool, was Mary, and when she found that by no possible chance could she make a conquest of Ben, and her dreams began to lose their novelty and charm, she decided that she was much too young to think seriously of love and that she had been very silly. Therefore, during the second two weeks of Ben's visit, she was heart-free and joyous, and content with sticking pins of ridicule into him when opportunity offered.

Ben had a very hazy idea of Mary's frame of mind. He did not understand her quick changes from apparent enmity to friendship and back. Her quick wit, her sarcasm, her knowledge of the world, her self-confidence kept him on tenterhooks until familiarity with them bred something of contempt and he became immune at just about the same time that Mary came to the more or less reluctant conclusion that she was not in love after all.

The friendship between Ben and Austen, begun by

that mysterious power that draws two human beings together out of a crowd, ripened and became stronger and stronger. It was destined to go on through many years, each year adding to its strength. Austen was tall but not quite so tall as Ben; he was slender, dark, handsome and graceful, forming a great contrast with Ben's heavy, gaunt frame and ugly face. Every one said that Austen was "a sweet boy," "a dear boy," "a perfect dear," "a peach," "a corker," or "an awfully good sort," depending upon the speaker's age and sex. There was nothing effeminate about him to warrant those terms; he was manly and he had not one atom of yellow in him. He was unspoiled, he was sincere, his disposition was even and charming; he was generous and modest and he loved his fellow men and women. He had no such prejudice against girls as Ben had, nor had he Ben's habit of silence nor Ben's blunt speech.

The month at Millhampton was a month of joy for Ben; day followed day crammed full of the joy of living. As John Thorpe had said he would, he met people of a world that had been unknown to him, a world of wealth, of breeding, and of that elusive thing called "Society." He met boys who were in Harvard and others who were going to Harvard with him. And Ben, through all that month, kept his mouth shut and watched and studied the manners and customs that were new to him.

Francis, the eldest of the Lees, came to Millhampton just before Ben left. He was going back for his senior year at Harvard, and Austen was going to room with him in Holworthy Hall in a room that had been passed from relative to relative or friend to friend for years and years. Francis had played games for years and had been a perpetual substitute, never quite good enough to make any of the big teams but never quite unskilful enough to be discarded entirely. He was going back to

try for tackle or end on the football team and a place somewhere in the Varsity crew, but he knew that unless a miracle happened he would never win his H.

He knew a great deal about football and rowing, even if an inherent clumsiness prevented his using his knowledge to the greatest advantage. When he saw Ben kick a football, saw him take the twisting oval out of the air with the same ease as a professional baseball player catches a fly, saw him pitch a game of baseball, and bat, saw him run, he knew that the kid was a better athlete than he could ever be. He was not jealous; loyalty to his university crowded out all other emotions. He resolved that Ben should not lack opportunity to show his worth.

CHAPTER V

BEN went from New York to Cambridge with Austen Lee, and took up his abode in the single room in Gray's Hall which had fallen to his lot. Of all the thousands of men in the university he knew only Austen well, and a half-dozen others slightly whom he had met at Millhampton or whom he had played against on school teams. No other boy had come to Harvard from Lanville in many a long year.

John Thorpe had sent him on his way with one word of advice: "Think well before you speak, and then don't speak if you can help it." That advice was nearly if not quite superfluous. Ben, as he grew older, had taken less and less interest in the small things of life,—petty discussions, small talk, criticisms, jealousies, and gossip. The men he met in college thought at first that he was morose and sullen, some thought that he was dull; his face had a surprisingly grave aspect for a boy of nineteen. As a matter of fact, Ben went slow; he hated the thought of being fresh, of letting his ambitions become known, of seeking popularity. He was conscious of no methodical plan of conduct, he was playing no part, he was simply obeying his innermost nature.

Hackett had told him of his own life at Harvard, of the mistakes that he had made and that Ben must not make. He had told him of the rich men and the poor men who would be his classmates, of athletics, of clubs.

of the college papers, of a hundred and one things that the university offered and of traps that he must avoid.

He went to a meeting of candidates for the freshman football team and saw a multitude of boys many of whom were there because it was the thing to do and not because they had the slightest hope, or perhaps desire, of making the team. Their object, to meet their fellows, was laudable enough, for a man who remained unknown to the mass got nowhere.

At the meeting he heard addresses by older men who demanded hard work, vigorous training, loyalty, and all that sort of thing, and was rather bored, for it seemed to Ben that any one who would not give his best without being implored to do so would be of little use.

The next day practice began and almost at once there was a herding of the sheep away from the goats. Most of the boys came from schools about Boston, and the best of them were known to the coaches and their reputations gained them a place among the select. Ben was among the chosen few and day after day as order came out of chaos there was no question that he would retain his place. He was the best punter on the squad, by far the fastest runner, quick as a cat, and very strong, and perhaps more important than all those he had an intuitive knowledge of how to play the game; he stood out as a giant among pygmies. Francis Lee had spoken about him to the Varsity coach and that important person had his eye on him. In those days freshmen were permitted to play on Varsity teams and the Varsity lacked a first-class punter and was weak on the right side of the line. Ten days after college opened Ben was taken to the varsity squad and put on the second eleven. It was in the freshman world a momentous happening and the name Thorpe was on every freshman's lips. Upper classmen, having greater experience, wondered whether the

boy was as good as he seemed to be or whether, as so often happened, the infant prodigy would prove a flash in the pan.

With Ben's prominence came popularity,—growing like a soap-bubble, Ben thought, and he would have none of it. All sorts of men he did not know spoke to him, not frankly but with their purpose perfectly clear: if he was to be a great man at Harvard they wanted to know him for what there might be in it for them. It was a sign of the politics that was being played in the class and that had, in fact, been played with an eye to the future even in school-days. Beneath the smooth surface of college life there was a struggle going on for prominence that would bring its reward in due course. Already there were cliques, founded for the most part on associations formed before the boys went to college. Groups from big schools were building fences, were employing every strategy to bring about the election of their members to clubs and societies and to offices in the class. Upper classmen were pulling wires for their freshmen friends and relatives. But all those individuals and factions knew that, given a reasonably pleasant personality and some of the qualifications of a gentleman, athletic prominence counted more than family, pull, wealth, and everything else combined.

Ben knew little of the internal workings of class politics and cared less but his sudden popularity did not deceive him: he understood human nature well enough. Austen, with a brother in the senior class, with a father who was a graduate, and coming from a school which contained only "gentlemen's sons," most of whom held social success to be the main goal of a college life, knew what was what, and he and Ben talked things over, as they were destined to talk things over for many a long day.

Austen was frank, he wanted to follow the path his father and brother had trod before him, but he would not sacrifice any of his self-respect to do it. Ben, with the smallest atom of sentiment, said that he would like to go along with Austen for the sake of their friendship but he'd be damned if he'd make up to anybody to do it; he guessed they could get along all right even if things did n't work out that way.

It was difficult for them to talk about that sort of thing and Austen jumped from it to another subject. "You're coming to room with me in Holworthy next year, you know," he said.

There was no reason why he should have asked Ben to do that unless he wanted him simply for his own sake, and Ben knew it. Rooms in Holworthy were very precious, they were the sole remaining glory of the Yard, the only glory which the Gold Coast had not dimmed.

"Are you sure you want me?" Ben asked. "It's a long way off."

Austen grinned. "Of course I'm sure. I would n't have asked you if I was n't, and you've got to come."

"Don't worry, I'll come quick enough," Ben said.

"That's the way to talk!" Austen exclaimed. "And now that that's settled you've got to do something else and you've got to do it because I tell you to."

"Yes, Popper," said Ben, meekly. "What is it?"

"You've got to dig yourself out of your shell and go see some people outside of college, in Boston and Brookline and other similar pleasant places."

Two or three times before Austen had asked Ben to call with him at houses where he promised that he would be welcome and each time Ben had given some excuse for not going. Now he looked at Austen sadly but with grim determination on his face.

"Oh, yes, I know," Austen went on, "you're a woman-

hater and a bashful little thing, and all that, but it's bunk, it's just plain nonsense. You're no different, really, from every other sane gent and you'll miss a lot of fun and a lot of other things if you don't have some life outside of college. You've got to know people, the right sort of people, or you'll never get anywhere and you might as well begin now. Beginning now means going to tea at the Grays' in Brookline Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Gray's a friend of Mother's, and Mother and I both promised you'd go. She's awfully pleasant."

"I have n't the slightest doubt of it, and we'd go there and say 'no thank you' to the tea and whatever there was to eat, and they'd be bored to death trying to make me feel at home, and wonder where you found me and there'd be a couple of pretty and brilliant girls who'd do their damndest to make a fool of me. No thanks."

"Why don't you like girls? They don't bite, and they're lots of fun."

"Just because for some reason or other they do bite me and I can't bite back. Why don't you like tomatoes?" It was well known that Austen particularly disliked tomatoes.

"What do you expect them to do?—fall in love with you and throw their arms around your neck the minute they see you? Girls are a game,—that is, girls as a tribe are, until you get to be friends with them, some of them,—and they're worth while, honestly they are. Ordinarily fellows take to 'em like ducks to water, but perhaps in your case they're an acquired taste. Come on, try it once. If you don't you'll be sorry some of these days."

"Why on earth should I be unhappy and make other people unhappy? They don't care a hang for me and I don't——"

"You ought to care a hang for them if you don't and

they 'll like you if you give them half a chance. You 'll turn into a grouchy old hermit if you're not careful. Come on, be a sport."

Eventually but very reluctantly Ben agreed to be a sport and he went to the Grays'. It was far from being the first time that Mrs. Gray had received freshmen in her house and she was expert in handling them. Austen had told her that Ben was the best fellow in the world, but that he hated girls and all that pertained to them and did n't like to go to parties or dances and such things. From Austen's description she rather expected to meet a conceited, eccentric youth and she imagined that Austen's enthusiasm for him would be temporary and had been brought about by admiration for his physical prowess. Mrs. Lee's recommendation had not been definite enough to give her a clear idea of the boy.

When she saw Ben and talked with him she was surprised and interested. She approached the subject of football warily and quickly gave it up, for it was quite apparent that Ben wanted no compliments, direct or indirect. She tried Lanville and found it better, and Millhampton and found it better still.

Other people came and Ben found himself with a Mrs. Williams, a woman of thirty-two or three, with the glory of her youth still upon her. She was very beautiful, her figure was fine, and she was most becomingly dressed. She had never heard of Ben until that moment and took it for granted that being at the Grays' he was like the usual Gray visitor. She approached Ben in the only way she knew how to approach any one,—pleasantly and without pose. She happened to be the first woman whose beauty had ever appealed to Ben and she did nothing to lessen the impression it made on him.

She understood that he was a stranger in a strange land, a very strange land for a country boy, and with

the kindness that was part and parcel of her she made his half-hour with her as pleasant as she knew how to make it. She had lived always under the shadow of the university and had seen many generations of its students come and go and she knew well how to treat its children, old and young. She had always been very popular, she had always liked men and boys; she liked Ben, his reserve that she thought was bashfulness, his seriousness, his face, and the great size of him; and she resolved, in a more or less indefinite way, to remember him and, if opportunity offered, to see something of him. She had never lost her fondness for boys.

"I wish you had n't come so soon," she said. "I have four small daughters and when they grow up I'll need men like you to dance with them and be beaux generally. I hope you'll come and see them sometime. They're too dear for words. Will you come?"

Of course he would go, and before Mrs. Williams departed she whispered to Mrs. Gray that she was quite in love with Ben, and a day or two later Mrs. Gray told her all about the curious boy.

"He likes me, anyway," Mrs. Williams said, rather proudly; even a mother of four daughters may be proud of pleasing a nineteen-year-old woman-hater.

Before Austen and Ben left, Mrs. Gray insisted that they should come to dinner, sometime, and immediately set about making that time definite. Austen ignored Ben and accepted for both of them an invitation to come on the following Sunday evening. When they were on their way home Austen said, "It was n't so bad, was it?"

"No, it was n't, if it pleases you to have me admit it. They're very nice."

"Of course they are; they're as nice as they make 'em, and there are lots more like them."

Austen was thinking that they were different from

Lanville people, but he said nothing about that, even if it was, perhaps, the reason Ben liked them and had n't liked the others. Indeed, Ben could not have begun his adventures into polite society with families more likely to make them successful than the Grays and the Williamses. Both husbands and wives were broad-minded, generous, and kindly, and they were untinged with that cold aloofness which is sometimes found in and about Boston.

The day after he met the Grays and Mrs. Williams, Ben, at football practice, played against Lawrence Forbes, a senior, who in his heart knew himself to be one of the brightest jewels of Harvard's diadem; pride of family, of wealth, of position, and of self were his to the fullest. Conceit, bodily strength, a narrow point of view, and some keenness of mind were his heritage. He was larger than Ben and he had had football experience and training Ben had never had, and in him Ben found the first man whom he could not handle easily on the football field. Forbes had no ax to grind, all his axes had been ground long since, and he had no use for the freshman upstart whom nobody knew, and he looked down on Ben disdainfully and superciliously. And all during that long afternoon Ben studied him, watched his every move, watched his face, and said never a word. He avoided Forbes so far as one man playing against another can avoid physical and mental contact with him.

But the next day Ben waded in like a wild beast. Grim determination was in his heart; cold cunning was in his brain; he had made up his mind what manner of man was opposed to him and he had resolved to do or die that day. He employed every trick he knew, every ounce of his strength, the last grain of his stamina. When Forbes found the boy tearing in like a wildcat,

fighting like a demon, he smiled and struck, under cover, and struck again, and found that the boy knew that game too and before very long he found himself on the defensive, hardly able to hold his own, and then entirely unable. He was beaten down, smashed and battered, outplayed, out-fought, out-gamed.

Ben dressed in silence and at the training-table ate in silence. There was a hush over the room, for every man in it knew what had happened and wondered what it foretold. They cast quick glances at Ben and saw his impassive face and cold eyes. They thought that he was calm, almost indifferent; they did not know how hard his heart was beating and how his knees were trembling under the table.

After dinner Ben went straight to his room to study, but it was no go, for the words of the printed page danced before his eyes. He tried to read, but he could not do that either and he went out into the Yard. He walked around Memorial Hall, to Holmes Field, and back to the Yard. He looked up at Austen's window in Holworthy, but it was dark and he went on to Gray's. Austen was sitting on the stairs waiting for him.

"Hello," Ben said. His voice was husky; he tried to hide his great emotion. He unlocked the door and held it open and Austen went in and lighted the student's lamp on the desk. Then he turned to Ben. "Well, young feller," he said, grinning, "you've had a pleasant afternoon, I understand."

"Just an ordinary afternoon." Ben would make no confession then.

"Maybe, but everybody's talking about it. They say you pretty nearly killed old Forbsie. You don't mind if I'm proud to know you, do you?"

Austen's good humor would not down. He was the one man to whom Ben could talk, and his companionship

was what the other needed. Ben was a boy fighting alone in a big world with only Austen to whom he could bare his heart.

Austen smiled on. "All the freshmen are betting that you'll make the varsity, but they can't find any takers," he said.

"Forbes knows more football than I do," Ben said.

"Why should n't he. Think what he's been through! How much did he teach you?"

Ben sank into his Morris chair, stretching his legs out before him and his arms over his head. The nervous tension had snapped, his breath went out of him in a great sigh. "He's yellow," he said, "yellow as a bright yellow dog."

"There's been talk about it before," Austen said, "but it's been hard to prove."

"It's a great life," Ben said. "You and I and all the rest of us came here to get an education out of books and otherwise, and instead of that the only important thing is beating some other fellow to a job on a football team and then making a holiday for the Great American Public, the way the gladiators used to do for the Dagoes."

The boys talked on until bedtime, discussing life most seriously, but always in their minds was the knowledge that the important thing was the battle that had been fought that afternoon.

The next day Ben was put on the varsity, on the other side of the line from Forbes, and there he stayed, and his battle with Lawrence Forbes was ended, temporarily.

On Sunday Ben and Austen went to the Grays' to dinner. Mr. Gray's enthusiasm for all things pertaining to Harvard had not decreased since his undergraduate days, and he was as keen now as then on victories in sports and the social and academic affairs of the uni-

versity; his loyalty had kept all the warp in his perspective, the Yale game was still a momentous event, not simply the apex of a boys' pastime.

He let his enthusiasm run away with him a little and made something of a hero of Ben, which was the last thing Ben wanted, especially before the two young ladies who rounded out the party. No two girls could have formed a greater contrast. Edith Graves was dark, short, plump, and merry; she talked rapidly and continuously, her adjectives were extravagant, her exaggerations were great, she was enthusiastic about everything, was lavish with praise, and she found in Ben and his football success a subject which was much to her liking. She was a flighty, sweet little hypocrite. Ben was in no frame of mind to listen to her broad compliments and sickening hyperbole and she disgusted him to the point of moroseness.

Clara Wilson, on the other hand, was tall, thin, and blonde; she had few enthusiasms, her manner was tinged with iciness, her heart was cold; she had never been in love, she had never thought of it. She had never even had a hero, either in real life or in literature. Of course sensible eighteen-year-old girls seldom fall in love seriously; at most they dream of it and have beaux and play with romance, knowing all the time, deep inside them, that the time for real love is a long way off.

But Clara was seemingly devoid of sentiment, though she herself insisted to her bosom friends that it was simply sentimentality which she lacked. She was a high-minded and honest girl and in after years the great regret of her life was to her that no man had ever been able to rouse the slightest trace of love in her.

That first evening with Ben she understood well enough that Edith's insincere attempts to make a hero of him annoyed him greatly and that, while he under-

stood her exaggerations well enough, he had no ability to treat them lightly and laugh at them. Clara did her best to counteract the trouble Edith was causing, but she had little success; she had no idea what sort of boy she was dealing with or that Ben's embarrassed silence was caused no more by the incidents of the moment than by his antipathy to her sex in general.

Mrs. Gray was willing enough to leave the talk to the young people, and it was not until dinner was nearly over that she realized that things were not going very well. Then she took a hand and led the conversation into safe channels, ably assisted by Austen, who in spite of all he could do had seen his plans for Ben's reformation go wrong. Even Mr. Gray curbed some of his tendency to magnify the importance of football and helped in the good work.

But the day could not be saved, things had gone too far for that. Ben's hide was never intended to resist such attacks; Edith's hypocrisy flicked it raw and Clara's sharp-pointed words, words sharper than she meant them to be, pierced it and reached tender spots underneath it.

The girls themselves were not entirely without inward qualms. They knew that there was competition among débutantes just as there was among college boys, even if the prizes were less tangible. They were very sure that Ben and Austen would be important men before many months had passed and they would have liked nothing better than to have their friendship and good will. But they must make the men come to them; they could not throw themselves at the men,—that was a fundamental law.

That evening Edith thought that she was doing well; Clara knew that things were going badly and she resolved to correct the error. Cold and unsentimental as she was herself, she resented that attitude in another,

toward her. As the evening wore on and Ben's complete indifference to her became apparent and her attempts to tease him into action failed, she made up her mind to change all that. She was clever and had confidence in her ability to interest a particular man when she cared enough to do it and this great boy offered her a sport which in those days she reveled in—the stirring up of sentiment which she had no power or wish to reciprocate. The masses did not interest her, an individual sometimes did.

There were no such subtleties about Ben. The evening was sufficient unto itself. He had but one desire,—to get away from it, out into the cool night air, and go home. On the car back to Cambridge Austen did nearly all the talking and he tried to make the best of what he knew was a bad situation. He laughed at Edith Graves and said that she was an amusing, silly little thing, but was awfully young and would get over it; he said that Clara Wilson's high-and-mighty bearing was only a mannerism and did n't mean anything, it would n't be noticed when one really knew her. All that was pretty near the truth, but Ben only grunted; he was through with that sort of business for ever and ever. When Austen left him at the corner of Gray's and went up the Yard to Holworthy he knew that old Ben was in his shell tighter than ever.

In the days that followed Ben would listen to no suggestion of further adventures in the land of girls, and his excuse was good enough: football and studies took all his time. The best he would do for Austen was to say, "Wait till we break training," and Austen knew that even that was simply dodging the issue, that there would be other excuses after training was over.

Austen made the freshman eleven, at end, and was more than content. His team won its big games, which

filled Austen's heart to overflowing with joy. The next thing was to play next to Ben on the Varsity in the years to come.

John Thorpe came to New Haven for the big game and saw Harvard beaten back slowly but surely by the Blue horde till one touch-down was scored and the game won; he saw his boy fight on till he was the only one left of the eleven boys who had started the game for the Crimson. He knew nothing of football and saw only the spectacular side of it, his boy punting after Wells went out of the game, the twisting and turning of the backs going around the ends, the wearing down of Harvard's defense which substitutes could not stem. He did not see that as the game went on the Blue's gains were made almost entirely through the left side of the Crimson's line, where Forbes was; he knew nothing of the struggle that was going on between Ben and his opponent in the line, but he knew that that opponent left the game and that Ben stayed in it. He saw his boy battered and bruised, his face covered with blood, his jersey torn, and finally he saw the Blue celebrate.

Afterward Ben said, "They were better than we were, that's all, Dad." They let it go at that, but John Thorpe knew that the boy was filled with anguish. But he was unhurt physically and that was something. The boys John Thorpe met sang Ben's praises; he had been pretty nearly the only bright spot in Harvard's defeat, and that, too, was consolation and something of which to be proud.

During the late autumn the newspapers had little to write about except football, in the sporting line, and accordingly they gave much space to it. Ben's youth and his sudden rise to prominence and his unquestionably great future caused the limelight to fall on him. Coming

from near New York, he was accorded a great deal of space by the New York papers.

A gentleman, Mr. Archibald Rossiter, well beyond middle age, dropped into his club on Fifth Avenue one afternoon, picked up a magazine that happened to be at hand, and glanced at the illustrations. Mr. Rossiter's clothes, his manners, his mannerisms, and his club were all evidence of his high place in society. His rather casual interest in the pictures quite unexpectedly became a concentrated examination of the portrait of Benjamin Thorpe, of whom he had read much and heard some talk. The printed portrait was a rather good one and the gentleman's interest became very keen. He noted the name and the date of the magazine and, leaving the club, purchased a copy, went home and searched for several photographs. These found, he compared them with the magazine picture. He promptly wrote to a friend at Cambridge, asking for all information available pertaining to Benjamin Thorpe. Receiving the reply that, among other things, he was the son of John and Martha (Coles) Thorpe, he was satisfied that he had stumbled upon a curious coincidence and nothing more. A later glance at the picture, however, caused him to look up the Thorpes and he found that they had had no children. He then took the bull by the horns,—went to Cambridge, and called upon the boy himself.

The gentleman beyond middle age chose to be straightforward and explained to the boy the purpose of his visit. Ben was equally frank. His father, whoever he was, was unknown; his mother lost, and better so. He did not even know by what name she had called herself; her name and his had been changed often as circumstances required. He thought it quite possible that the woman he had known as his grandmother was so in

name only, for convenience. It would be well to let matters rest as they were.

Regretfully the visitor went his way. His consolation was that if the boy, by a miracle, should be as it seemed possible he might be, he would do honor to the family. The gentleman was a judge of men.

But Ben Thorpe would not leave his mind and he called to see John Thorpe at his office, only to discover that he was at home, ill. He went at once to Lanville to talk to John Thorpe, if that were possible. Instead of John Thorpe living, he found Ben, and John Thorpe dead.

He went his way and later on discovered, through his lawyer, that Benjamin Thorpe, adopted son of John and Martha Coles Thorpe, was the bastard son of Elizabeth Bassett and that she had stated that she did not know who his father was.

With the last trace of Elizabeth Bassett lost years before, Archibald Rossiter gave up.

John Thorpe had been gone from Cambridge less than a week when Ben received a letter from Mrs. Thorpe saying that his father was not well, and it was followed by a telegram telling Ben that he was seriously ill and that Ben should come at once. He reached home early the next morning but even so he was too late, for John Thorpe had died of pneumonia at midnight.

It was a cold, dreary, rainy day and he was alone with Martha Thorpe, who whispered in the house of sadness. There were, always, tears on the woman's cold, hard face,—tears that seemed to Ben artificial and conventional, tears that flowed too copiously. He sought seclusion to hide his great grief. Hackett came and sat with him and took him out of doors over the hills in the

pouring rain, bringing some consolation to the boy and a little relief to his overwhelming sorrow.

The days that followed brought flowers in profusion and words of sympathy that Ben could not resent, but that seemed futile; they served only to accentuate his sorrow, to add to the numbing solemnity of the house. Hackett alone brought solace.

John Thorpe was dead, a father gone, a father childless till Ben had come that afternoon on the Hudson. John Thorpe was gone, and Ben was alone in the world, bereft of a love that had been more to him than all the world besides.

The burial was in the sunshine in the cemetery in Lanville, and then Ben was alone with his foster-mother. There followed a harsh, unsympathetic dinner for the woman and the boy, alone.

"You are going to live with your sister in Chicago?" he asked.

"Yes. What will you do?" She knew well enough that she and Ben would separate.

"I shall do well enough at college." He ignored vacations and the years after college.

"He was very good to you."

"Yes, and to you, and you to me." Ben made a small concession to the woman for the sake of the burden that had been placed on her.

"I did not mean that," she said.

"You mean the money he has left me?" Ben knew that the woman was piqued that John Thorpe had left Ben's money in trust for him and out of her control. As she had had no influence over the boy, now she had no power over him. She would have liked to have some authority over him.

"Yes, thirty thousand dollars," she said, as though it were too great a sum for him to have, almost as

though her husband had made a great mistake in leaving Ben a third of his property.

"Even the interest is more than I need to finish college. Will you take some of it?"

"No! We must do as he wished." Hers was a sanctimonious voice.

Ben said nothing more of the money.

The next day they parted, forever. Before the winter was passed she, too, was dead, and over sixty thousand dollars came to Ben, the adopted son, under the terms of John Thorpe's will. His guardians were Hackett and an officer of the Lanville Trust Company, and Ben's money was to remain in their care until he was of age. He cared little for what was great wealth for a boy in college.

Ben went back to Cambridge like one in a dream. His heart was near to breaking. He was alone in the world, not a soul was bound to him by any tie of blood; he had no home, his father was gone, he had no one for whom to work, no one cared whether he did well or poorly. The love for his father which had pervaded his every hour, governed his every act and word, was left desolate. Only Hackett, whom he left behind, and Austen to whom he was going were his friends; only they mattered, only with them would he find an atom of consolation.

Austen met him when he reached Cambridge and even he, who knew how great was Ben's grief, was shocked at his friend's face and demeanor. Ben seemed years older than when he had gone away, his eyes had despair and hopelessness in them, he spoke hardly at all. Austen, his perception keen and his sympathy great, understood Ben's need and took charge of him. Words were unnecessary, the boy craved only the other's presence. They studied together, walked together, ate side by side; for two weeks they were hardly separated for a moment

except to sleep, and it seemed to Austen that Ben was sinking deeper and deeper toward melancholia. He could not study, it was impossible for him to concentrate upon the work at hand, he was restless and nervous, his appetite disappeared. Austen was worried, something must be done for Ben, but what to do he did not know.

The Christmas holidays were only two weeks away and Austen insisted that Ben should spend them with him in Alden.

"I can't," Ben said, "I—I can't go and spoil your fun, I'd cast a pall over your whole family. I'm in no shape to go anywhere: I don't want to see any one and I'm dead sure no one wants to see me."

"Nonsense! It will be the best thing in the world for you; you won't have to do a blessed thing you don't want to; the change will be good for you. What will you do if you don't come?"

"Stay here. I'll be better alone."

The argument lapsed, to be taken up again, but not before luck came to Austen's aid.

CHAPTER VI

IT rained in torrents one afternoon and Austen suggested that they get their exercise in the gymnasium. On their way to the showers afterward they came upon Jim Conley giving a pupil a boxing-lesson and they stopped to watch them. Conley was skilful and active for a man well beyond youth. He blocked the wild swings of his pupil and tapped him lightly with the tip of his glove; he called off hostilities at odd moments to give explanations. The lesson ended and Conley turned to Ben and Austen. He recognized Ben and grinned, looked him up and down, and laid an admiring hand on his arm and shoulder.

"Some heavy-weight you'd make, Mr. Thorpe," he said, and then he added, "Have you ever boxed?"

Ben shook his head and picked up a glove.

"Take him on, Conley," Austen said, "and give him a good licking."

For the first time in weeks a smile came on Ben's lips; it was only the suspicion of a grim smile, but it was something.

"What d' you say, Mr. Thorpe? Would you like to try it?" Conley asked.

Ben nodded. He slipped on the big gloves and Austen tied them for him and he faced Conley. The old light had come back in his eyes, the old animation on his face, and Austen saw it. "Knock the tar but of him, Jim," he said.

Ben's hands went up and instinctively he assumed a crouching attitude, covering up as he had done away back in his days on the New York streets. Conley feinted and then sent a light blow toward Ben's face; Ben ducked and struck, Conley stepped back out of the way. He was watching Ben. They toyed at the game for a minute or two, Conley taking the defensive. Then he saw an opening and landed hard on Ben's chin.

"That's the stuff! Do it again." The blow roused Ben, it gave him a very pleasant sensation. He went at Conley, and some of the fighting spirit of his pugilistic days came back to the teacher. He stood his ground and let his fists fly. Within another minute they were at it shovel and tongs.

"Cut the science! Hit me!" Ben cried, and Conley rained ineffective blows on Ben's head and body; the big pillowy gloves could not hurt him.

Ben went after Conley, forcing the fighting, forcing the instructor back and back and round and round, landing blows that by the mere weight behind them nearly lifted the older man from his feet.

"Enough!" Conley cried finally, grinning. "I'll be no punching-bag for no wildcat," he said. There was admiration in his face, he knew a fighter when he saw one.

"It's a good game, and good exercise," Ben said. He turned to Austen and saw that a half-dozen men had gathered behind him, Lawrence Forbes among them, and there was a sneer on Forbes's face. Ben held out the gloves to Austen to be untied and as he did so he heard Forbes say:

"The street-fighting type."

Ben wheeled toward him, every muscle in his body quivering with rage and his eyes flashing, but Forbes had spoken as he walked away and he did not see Ben.

"The yellow cur!" Ben's words were intended only

for Austen's ears, but Ben was in no mood to moderate his voice. Two other men had heard what he said. Ben's anger cooled quickly; he realized that the words Forbes had used meant no more than that Ben possessed no knowledge of scientific boxing. Forbes knew nothing of Ben's early life, he could not have had that in mind when he spoke. But there had been a sneer in his words, as there had been on his face, and Ben had no use for him. He had ignored Forbes, he had never spoken to him voluntarily during the football season. He did not like what Forbes represented, he did not like the man,—he who fancied himself so mightily and who was a snob, and who was yellow.

The five minutes of fighting—it was not boxing—the joy of battle, the thrill of giving and receiving hard blows had for a moment made Ben forget his misery, and Austen saw it. The look, not of a beaten dog but of a dying dog, that had been in Ben's eyes vanished and the old expression of courage, of the joy of combat came back. It was the first ray of sunshine Austen had seen since Ben's return.

And luck was with Austen in his task. That evening they met Charley Morse, a merry boy who had been guard on the football team. He greeted Ben jovially and went to Ben's room with them, "for just a minute," and then Austen told him that Ben had made Jim Conley cry for mercy.

"Why don't you take a fellow your size?" Charley exclaimed. "What do you want to pick on a poor old wreck like Jim for?" Then he asked Ben if he knew anything of boxing. Ben said that he did not know a blessed thing about it and Austen volunteered the information that he did n't have to.

"Why does n't he have to?" Charley said, laughing.

"A slugger does n't stand a chance on earth against a scientific man,—one like me, for instance."

"Don't be too sure of that, Chas. He's a bear."

Morse looked the two boys over carefully. "What are you kids trying to do?—pick a scrap with me?" he demanded.

"I suppose it would be *lès majesté* to punch your royal face," Austen said, "especially for a freshman."

Charley knew something of boxing and liked it and he liked Ben and Austen. "Come on and try it," he said. "What do you say, son? Want to don the gloves with a master and get your precious block knocked off?"

"Sure I do," Ben said. "Do you mean it?"

"Certainly I do. How about to-morrow afternoon about four o'clock, down at my place?"

"We'll be there," Austen said, enthusiastically. Ben was grinning.

"Right! And I give you fair warning, if you treat me rough I'll beat you over the head with a club."

Charley Morse was large, strong, and active; he was not as tall as Ben and his reach was not as great, but he knew something about boxing and it would have taken a pile-driver to hurt him. Compared with him Jim Conley was certainly a doddering old wreck. Morse, like Ben, was in fine physical condition and they settled down to a good thumping-match, with no intermission for twenty minutes. Ben grinned through it all, finding enormous joy in sending home the big, soft gloves to Charley's head or body, and almost as much in walking into one of them himself. They jarred him, sometimes, but it was a most pleasant sensation.

A group gathered about them, applauding, commenting, and criticizing good-naturedly. Forbes, fresh from a game of squash, was there when they finished. He chose to be pleasant, on Charley's account.

"Which one is giving the lesson?" he asked.

"The kid licked the old man," some one said.

"Draw's the fair decision," another said. And then a third, who knew a thing or two, who disliked Forbes, and who liked to start something, said, "Put on the gloves with Thorpe, Larry, and see who gets the lesson."

That suggestion was the match which started the conflagration. Forbes tried to ignore the remark, but a chorus made that impossible. Some one said he was afraid and there was sport afoot. Forbes tried to laugh it off, and nearly if not quite succeeded.

Nothing came of it, then, nor the next afternoon when the whole thing was repeated, but on a third it became more serious. The goads were numerous and sharp-pointed; there was deviltry on tap and fun to be had.

No one really knew how the thing was finally brought about, step by step. No one had been serious about it in the beginning, there was nothing serious about it until almost the very end. It was nothing more than a lark, a child of the inventive minds and high spirits of undergraduates. Ben was ignored at the beginning, all the talk was directed at Forbes and he tried to belittle the whole thing with flippant comment. His humor was strained and the others were quick to see it. He tried to dodge the issue by depreciating Ben's and Charley's skill, and by saying that neither of them was worthy to stand up with him. The others jumped at that and told him he was a bluff.

On the surface it was banter; underneath a current of bad blood began to run. Some of them knew what had happened on the football field; others were simply irresponsible and keen for a little excitement.

"Thorpe thinks you're yellow." The speaker was the one to whom the idea had come originally and he was one of the men who had heard Ben call Forbes a yellow

cur in the gymnasium. The word "yellow" caused Ben to glance sharply at the speaker and every one saw the glance. His eyes met Ben's and from that minute there was no retreat for Forbes. Ben turned and followed Morse to his room, to dress.

A minute later two men came into the room.

"It's all arranged," they said. "Heavy-weight championship of the university, Marquis of Gooseberry Rules, day after to-morrow, diamond belt to the winner."

"Nothing doing," Ben said.

"Why not?"

"I'm not interested, that's all."

The messengers were in a hurry, apparently. "You make him behave, Charley," they said. "He's your infant prodigy with the gloves."

"He'll be there; I'll be one of his seconds," Morse answered.

"You can all cut out your joshing," Ben said. "I'm not going to make a show of myself to amuse a lot of you bums, especially with Forbes. If you want to see a prize-fight you know where to go."

"G'wan, kid, be a sport!" They were in the doorway and still in a hurry. "It's up to you, Charley, we'll leave it to you." They went their way, closing the door behind them.

"What are they trying to do,—make a fool of me?" Ben asked.

"They're keen for a bit of fun, that's all. You and Forbes will be unmercifully joshed."

"A lot of your precious friends, down round this part of town, would do anything for a bit of excitement, and a freshman is always ripe for picking. I'm not going to have anything to do with it."

"Afraid of Forbes?"

Ben glanced up quickly from the shoes he was tying.

"Maybe—and maybe not—but I'm not going to play the game he and his friends want me to play. I don't care much for his kind."

"They're harmless," Charley said. "It's a type that makes the university what it is, all-embracing. They form a fine contrast with pure democracy, make us appreciate it."

"They're a damn-poor bunch," Ben said, a little angrily, "and I'm not going to mix with 'em any way at all."

"Oh, well, it'll blow over. They can't make you do it if you don't want to; and, besides, you can have your own friends there, you know." Morse mixed things up a little.

"Nothing doing."

Ben meant nothing doing. Those upper classmen, a sporty, self-satisfied lot of egotists, had no other thought than that of amusing themselves at his expense. Nothing would please them more than to make game of a freshman from nowhere who had shot up into prominence and outshone one of their own cherished stars.

Austen came into the room and said that some one had told Forbes that Ben had said he was yellow.

"Who was it?" Ben asked.

"I don't know. Bill Wells told me and he said Forbes was quite indignant, almost annoyed that you should have had the temerity to say that. Anyway, he's looking down on you as though you were a worm."

"Let him look. I'm not going to fall for him."

When Ben was walking back to the Yard the absurdity of the whole thing flashed over him. It was all nothing but talk, the chatter of an idle moment that he had taken seriously while he was in the snob atmosphere. Austen laughed and thought that it was no more than that, and he laughed, too, because the thrill of Ben's



scraps with Charley Morse and the thought of a scrap with the man he hated had for an hour taken Ben's mind off his sorrow. And when, after dinner that night, Ben sat at his desk working hard with his old concentration, Austen, watching from the window-seat, was happy.

The news that Thorpe was to mix it with Forbes spread like wild-fire. The absurdity, in the mouths of the students, became a fact and was embellished and took on color. A notice or two in glittering terms was posted where it would do the most good, or harm; there was much talk and most of it was good-natured, but the few who knew what was what were serious about it and said it would n't do. Some of the older, wiser men asked what the game was, anyway, what was the use of it. They said it was absurd, but they simply added fuel to the flame.

To the mass it was a lark, something to talk about, an affair that might become an event, a thing that happened once in a lifetime, never to be forgotten. Of course it might be tame, nothing more than a peaceful bout with pillows, with no harm done,—in which case the thing to do was to dress it up, make a burlesque of it, and if it turned out to be something more than tame there'd be no harm done.

All during the day Ben denied, to man after man, that there was anything in it; it was just a josh. But his denials were not accepted. Every one said it was really coming off; they thought that perhaps Ben just wanted to keep the crowd down.

Some fool had handbills struck off announcing the go, with weights, heights, ages, seconds, et cetera, and mentioned the diamond belt. Charley Morse and Austen Lee were given as Ben's seconds, Jim Conley was to referee, the bout was to go ten rounds to a decision; and the

strong grip of the undergraduates closed on Ben. He protested to Charley Morse and Charley said it was just one of those things that happen and could n't be helped. Maybe it was all wrong, but the facts were plain enough, Ben was facing a condition not a theory.

"Did you call Forbes yellow?" he asked.

Ben nodded.

"Did you say it out loud?"

"I said it to Austen, in my room, with the door shut."

"And I did not repeat it, naturally," Austen said.

"Of course you did n't. Somebody guessed at it,—to help things along."

"They say that you said it in the gym the day you boxed with Conley," Morse said.

"Did I? I don't remember. I remember Forbes said I was a street fighter and I may have lost my temper. I came from the streets originally, you know, Charley; perhaps that's why I don't care much for Forbes's type."

"Don't you think you'd better see it through?" Morse said.

"If Forbes wants to fight I'll fight him, though it seems a childish thing to do. I'll fight him alone, in his room or in the cellar, wherever he likes, but I'm not going to do it to amuse the whole college."

"There's no way out now, Ben, that I can see. What started as a joke picked up something serious along the way."

"Tell 'em all to go to hell, with my compliments."

But it was not to be. Later on Ben tried to make Austen see it his way, but Austen was curiously silent and finally Ben put the question to him, point-blank.

"Do you want me to do it?"

"I don't want you to—but haven't you got to, old man?"

Ben's lips twisted themselves into a queer shape that

was not a smile. He picked up a bit of paper from his desk and folded it over and over. From out of the far-distant past there came a vision of another boy who had been yellow, another mucker; of a fight; of his enemy lying on the ground at his feet; of the cold water in the horse-trough. It had been a job that needed doing. And the day had come again.

"All right, son, s'pose we call it a date," he said.

And again the news spread like wild-fire.

Forbes dared not quit. Perhaps he had some thought of revenge.

The great room was jammed full and there was a crowd outside. Ropes had been rigged up in a makeshift fashion and the space inside was clear. The handbills had spoken truer than they knew; the idea had been good, a humdinger.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce Battling Forbes—" Cheers drowned the rest of the announcement, which was something about Forbes's prowess and previous victories, his weight, and so on. "And on the other mit Kid Thorpe." Again shouting stopped the announcer, who thought he was being funny. Somehow the fun did n't get across, somehow the shouting was just noise and fell flat.

"It's no joke this. Look at Thorpe," some one whispered to his neighbor.

Ben's face was grim. He stood beside the ropes, hating the shouts and the talk he heard and hating the man across the ring; the devil had Ben's soul in his grip, anger was in his heart. The thing had to be done and it should be done right; he had no fear of the man across the way.

Jim Conley was there in the ring and was introduced. There was a whistle instead of a bell and it was blown

as an example; the timekeeper held his watch in his hand; Charley Morse and Austen were beside Ben with a bucket of water, towels, and a sponge. Charley put Ben's gloves on; they were not as large as the ones Ben was used to.

"Shake hands! shake hands!" The cry was taken up and repeated and then there was silence.

"They'll shake hands after the last round," the announcer said. For once he had his wits about him.

Ben was facing Forbes, waiting. His left arm was straight out before him, his right hand at his waist. The crouch came instinctively, the crouch that had been born in him, his natural fighting pose, the crouch that had been his in every battle back in the days when he had fought on the streets.

He waited, to see what Forbes would do.

Forbes came straight at him, grinning. He was very big, was Forbes; he weighed forty pounds more than Ben and exceeded Ben's six feet by more than three inches.

Forbes's grin was a sneer, and it came closer and closer. He feinted, struck, and struck again, and then rushed; and Ben met him, not with his right but with his stiff left on the eye. The blow told, Forbes backed away, and Ben waited.

Forbes came on again, slowly and carefully, and a minute, two minutes passed with no harm done, blows given and taken doing no harm.

Then came the rush. Forbes's gloves rained blows on Ben, on his arms and body and head, blows that did not hurt. Let him try that game if he liked and wear himself out. Forbes needed no defense against Ben and his arms swung wildly. Ben dodged and ducked and retreated before the onslaught round and round the ring.

And then suddenly from nowhere came paralysis, al-

most darkness, dim, dancing lights, a muffled roar, a sea of gray faces, a horrible yellow before him, coming closer, and a piercing sound—the whistle. Forbes had landed with all his strength and weight fair and true just above Ben's belt.

Cold water on his face, the air from waved towels, arms worked up and down cleared his brain a little, brought back his breath. He went back, weak but knowing what he was doing. The face before him was a bit hazy, it moved round and round in a circle. Ben was tired, he would have given a lot to lie down and close his eyes and rest, but he knew he could n't do that. He remembered another time when he had been hurt, when another face danced about before him and blows fell on his arms and shoulders. He had weathered that storm and he could weather this one; it was the same story all over again. He had waited before, kept away from the other until the other wore himself out. He would do that again.

He heard a din all about him, a weird jumble of sounds punctuated now and then by a definite voice. Some one said, "Stop them, it's gone far enough"; another that the kid would be killed; a third that the fun had gone out of it and some one would have to pay through the nose if it went on. Ben knew that it would have to go on.

He lasted the round out, watching carefully, keeping clear and waiting.

Another rest and he was strong again and met his man on nearly even terms. He tried for Forbes's head, but it was far away and the few blows he sent home fell weakly and did no harm. Forbes forced the fighting, was always the aggressor. He was sure the boy could n't last: he had had him groggy once and the end of the

round had saved him; he could do it again and he went at it.

In the fourth round Forbes began to worry. His size and his science were not bringing their reward quickly enough; Thorpe seemed to be growing stronger rather than weaker, and he was coming forward to meet his rushes instead of giving way before them. Forbes's blows seemed to do no harm, and Thorpe was landing on him.

The fifth round saw the turning of the tide. Ben gave no ground but forced the fighting; he ignored Forbes's head and rained blows on his body. Those blows did not hurt much, but they slowed Forbes down, they took his wind, they made it difficult for him to strike.

The kid came at him like a tiger in the sixth, and played a tattoo on his ribs and stomach. And he could not hit the boy who fought after the manner of muckers in the street, his head was back of his left arm, he who had no science had the instinct of scientific defense, he crouched and Forbes's blows went past him or glanced off his shoulders and arms. The mucker was quick as a cat too, his gloves traveled like lightning, he stepped from side to side like a master.

Half-way through the seventh Ben's fist shot up from right to left and landed fair on Forbes's elbow and Forbes's arm dropped to his side, numb and powerless, and then Ben's gloves fell on Forbes's ribs and stomach so regularly that Forbes could tell when they were coming,—one-two, one-two, one-two, like the ticks of a clock.

All thought of victory had fled; Forbes would be content if he could stay on his feet till the end. His strength was gone, he could hardly move, his body was dead, but his mind was active. He wanted to quit, but he dared not quit; his fear of the disgrace of quitting to a man who had called him yellow was greater than his fear

of the thrashing that he was getting. There were only three rounds more. Afterward he could say that he had purposely not knocked out Thorpe. If he could last through three more rounds he could tell some story, afterward, that would do.

Ben came up for the eighth round stronger and fresher than he had been at the beginning. There was a wild beast in Ben and it had him in its clutches. From the third round on he had fought on the straight lines of his plan. No mere victory would satisfy him, nothing would satisfy him but to annihilate his enemy, the vain, snobbish egotist. In annihilating him he would show his whole tribe what he thought of them.

The man was a quitter, yellow to the core; he was afraid to quit and the fear of quitting, what it would mean to quit, kept him on his feet. A brave man, a white man, would have admitted defeat and begged for mercy with a smile on his face and his hand outstretched; a brave man could have afforded to quit when he was beaten. But Forbes had to stand up to the bitter end.

Such was Ben's reasoning and he had no mercy in his heart: the house of Forbes should come crashing down in ruins. He went at his work with devilish cruelty. Forbes's arms hung almost limp, he had scant strength to raise them to ward off the torrent of blows that Ben rained on his body,—his poor, battered, bruised body. His defense, what there was of it, was low and weak, nearly useless, and Ben knew it and took full toll of it.

Ben was strong, there was not a pain or an ache in him, he was cool and calm and methodical. The glory of victory, the thrill of success, the animal joy of combat held full sway over him. He knew no mercy, he was a brute, when the eighth round ended. The crowd around him might have been a thousand miles away, he

did not notice even Charley Morse or Austen, he did not hear what they said to him. He washed his face himself and dried it, he sucked water from the sponge and spit it out and then stood watching Forbes.

The ninth round came and he walked slowly across the ring.

One-two, one-two, one-two, his gloves thudded against Forbes's body. Again, one-two, one-two, one-two, like a machine.

Then he feinted with his left to Forbes's body and Forbes's arms made a slow movement forward, a despairing attempt to ward off the blows that were taking his last ounce of strength. Ben was watching; he feinted again with his left, low to the body, and his right hand, starting low at his side, shot up, shot up like a flash with every ounce of Ben's strength and weight behind it.

Not since the third round had he aimed a blow at Forbes's head.

It landed fair on the point of Forbes's jaw, and Forbes's arms dropped to his side, his eyes went glassy, his body trembled, and then with careful aim, with cold calculation Ben, the brute, struck again, sideways with his left and again upward with his right, and Forbes fell backward, like a great log, and lay motionless on the floor.

Ben stood above him, looking down on him for an instant. Then he turned, pushed his way through the crowd, and went to Morse's room. Charles and Austen were at his heels. Ben still wore his boxing-gloves; he forgot them until he tried to undo his trunks; he held them out to Austen, who untied them. Then Ben went to the shower-bath. He was unmarked, he was not breathing hard, there was not a sign of the battle about him. He came from the shower, wearing only a towel, and searched for his pipe and lighted it; he sank back

in a Morris chair and smoked. Morse threw a heavy bath-robe over him. Not one of them had spoken a word since they entered the room.

Finally Austen broke the silence. "Tired?" he asked.

Ben shook his head. "No, not a bit," he said, "but I'm damned well ashamed of myself. Is Forbes all right?"

Neither of them knew.

"Why on earth should you be ashamed of yourself?" Charley asked. "You licked a man twice your size."

"Oh, yes, I know; that part of it's all right, he had it coming to him."

"Then what's the trouble? Forbes will get over it quickly enough."

"The trouble is that—that—well, he hit me, knocked the wind out of me, in the beginning and it took me a round or so to get over it. I remember that part of it clearly enough, but I don't remember anything after that till I saw him lying on the floor; that is, I don't remember the rounds or the intermissions or the crowd or the noise or you fellows or anything but just beating Forbes into a pulp. If he hit me after that first time I did n't know it, I knew as soon as my wind came back and I began to hit him that I had him, I knew that I could wear him down and knock him out; I could have done it long before I did, I think, but I wanted to torture him. I ought to have quit, called it off when I knew I had him. You knew I had him long before the end, did n't you?" The others nodded. "That's why I'm ashamed of myself, I could n't quit."

"No, you could n't quit," Morse said. "You had to see the thing through. Forbes did n't quit, he would n't let his seconds throw up the sponge."

"Forbes was afraid to quit, he did n't dare; if he was n't yellow and a mucker he'd have admitted he was licked and called it off. You'd have done that, Charley;

you would n't have had to get knocked out to prove you were n't yellow."

"Well, I don't know." Then Charley laughed. "If you'd treated me the way you treated Larry I'd have thrown the water-bucket at you. I guess Larry, everything considered, had to take his medicine to the last drop."

"That's just what I said, the yellow was too close to the surface. That's the difference between Forbes and Dean in the Yale game." Ben had played against Dean in the line. "I did n't want to put him out, I did n't want him to quit, but he did quit when he knew he was through and no more use to the team. He did n't have to wait till he was down and out and had to be carried off the field; he was n't yellow."

Morse laughed. "You've got a lot of highfalutin ideas in your fool head," he said. "You'd better get your clothes on or you'll catch cold or something."

Ben was half dressed when some one knocked on the door. It proved to be Green, a friend, and they let him in.

"Larry has just regained consciousness," he said. "I thought you might like to know it. The doctor says he'll come round all right. The little joke turned serious, did n't it?"

"Where is he?" Ben asked.

"In his room; they were carrying him there when I left. Are you all right?"

"Yes."

Then Ben lapsed into silence. He finished dressing and said good-by to Charley Morse and he and Austen went to dinner. It was a silent meal, Ben's silence was catching. The story of the fight was known everywhere, but references to it brought no response from Ben. There was a cloud on his face, his eyes were cold and

he did not look about, but ate rapidly and went away with Austen. Ben was face to face with the brute that was part of him, with the brute who, roused, had made a fiend of him. The memory of the fight was horrible to him. He had done a lot of fine arguing with himself, but it had been rot. He had seen Forbes lying, still, at his feet. Green said that Forbes had been unconscious for half an hour. He was ashamed.

"I'm through, Austen," he said. "I've made a fool of myself. I talked too much, I started the fight, and I could n't quit when I should have. I was a beast. And that's not all: I was n't man enough to stand up and take my medicine when Father died, I quit then when I should n't have. I'm going to brace up and be a man. I'll go to Alden with you for vacation if you still want me to, and I'll try to behave."

His fight with Forbes convinced Ben of two things. The first was that he talked too much, for he had called Forbes a yellow cur, out loud when others could hear, when he had lost his temper. He made up his mind that he would not lose his temper again and that he would keep his mouth shut,—he who was already becoming known as the silent one. The second was that he must learn to hide his emotions, that he must not let others know his sorrows, that he must bear up under them whatever they might be. He must control himself absolutely and he must conquer the devil in him that had made a beast of him.

Ben took his lesson to heart. His determination was made and when Ben's mind was made up nothing on earth could change it.

CHAPTER VII

BEN and Austen traveled to Alden on a night train which dumped them out into the cold early in the morning. They reached the Lee house before any one was awake. They bathed and shaved and dressed leisurely and even then reached the breakfast-table before any other members of the family appeared. Half-way through his oatmeal Austen said:

"Remember, Ben, you're to do exactly what you like. You're to be a member of the family."

"Will you do just what you want to do?" Ben answered; "go to dances and parties and things, just as though I weren't here? I can stay home with your father and mother if they are here, or alone if they're not," Ben said. "There's a book somewhere about the house, I suppose."

"The place is full of 'em; ask Mother, she's librarian. As a matter of fact, I don't know how much is going on. I suppose there's a dance or two, and dinners; there usually are this time of year. Mary's my social secretary. Does n't she eat the gay life alive, though!"

"I imagine she does," Ben admitted. "She's very different from Elizabeth and Hope, is n't she?"

Austen said that she was different on the surface; she had an enormous craving for admiration and a great ambition to be a leader in her set. "She'll get over it," he added. "She has all kinds of good sense underneath. She's a lot like Mother, really."

Ben was not quite sure of that, but he only said: "I think your mother is very wonderful."

That pleased Austen. He knew full well that his mother was a wonderful woman, but that was not the point. He was pleased because Ben, who had never liked any other woman, liked her. He could imagine no greater compliment.

"The better you know her the better you'll like her," he said, without putting too much sentiment into his voice.

Ben, waiting for his bacon and eggs, said: "I don't suppose you can understand what it means to me to know a woman like your mother. You've known her all your life; I never knew, until I was nineteen, that there was any one like her in the world, any one even remotely like her. It was a brand-new discovery."

Austen laughed. "Of course there are n't many like Mother," he said, "but women as a whole are n't nearly as bad as you think they are. If you'd only get that crazy idea out of your head, you'd—"

The bacon and eggs and Hope, arriving simultaneously, left Austen's wisdom unspoken. Hope threw her arms about Austen's neck and kissed him and then approached Ben with a smile and some dignity, her hand held forward. He took it and held it and Hope, considering the situation for an instant, threw dignity to the winds and treated him as she had treated Austen.

Mrs. Lee was at Hope's heels and the others close at hers, except Mary, who had retired in the small hours, after a dance, and was preparing for another. Mary, who was within a few weeks of eighteen, was a *débutante*.

Hope and those who followed her stopped all discussion by Austen of Ben's most prominent characteristic. The conversation turned to the weather and the prospects

of skating, and Elizabeth who had been told that the ice was excellent, suggested that the least the boys could do was to take her to Hopedale; she'd know plenty of people when she got there and could take care of herself. She knew that she could get there alone perfectly well, but big brother and big brother's friend were highly desirable ornaments, if they could be inveigled into playing the part of escorts.

They could, and the result was an entirely satisfactory day. They reached home after dark. Ben was very tired and more sleepy than tired, after a night on the train and a long day in the open. He dressed for dinner, came downstairs, and sank into a chair before the fire. Hope was reading under a lamp close by.

"I'm an old, old man," Ben said, wearily. Hope laughed at that, though of course Ben really was quite old. "What are you reading?"

Hope brought the book to Ben and was quickly curled up on his lap. They discussed weighty matters until, from out of the great unknown, Jean Vance appeared, a little early for dinner.

She came into the room unannounced, she was quite at home in the Lee house. Hope scrambled to her feet and performed the ceremony of presenting Ben to her. Then Austen arrived on the scene. He and Jean were very glad to see each other and had a great deal to talk about, which made it possible for Ben to doze until the others came.

He dozed most of the evening; he marveled that Austen was not only wide awake but looking forward with unquestionable pleasure to a ball, beginning at eleven and ending Heaven only knew when.

Mary had decided that Ben was impossible. She had her share of admiration for male giants who played strenuous games with great skill and courage; she ap-

preciated the glamour of such achievements and the weight they carried with the youth of the land, but a man simply had to have something beside the physical side of him. Austen said Ben was not stupid, that he was very deep and had a fine mind; her father thought he was an exceptional boy who showed great promise. That might all be true, it did n't make any difference; so far as she was concerned he was utterly useless and uninteresting.

She had told Jean Vance that Ben was queer, and she had gone into details; he was a bearish individual, a sort of perpetual grouch, almost a boor. Men seemed to like him, but she could n't see anything in him at all. And Ben talked hardly at all that evening. He sat between Miss Vance and Mrs. Lee and the little he said he said to his hostess. Jean talked to him, or better at him, and elicited a few monosyllables in reply.

Yet Jean Vance was fascinated; what Mary had told her influenced her not at all, Ben's stolidity was nothing; that he was not interested in her and made no effort to please her made no difference. She arranged things after dinner so that she could watch him, and her eyes were on him constantly. She went to the ball and thought not of her partners or of the dance but of Ben; she went home and to bed, and, awake and asleep, she dreamed of the great youth's eyes and chin and lips and of his arms about her, holding her tight.

Jean Vance was not quite nineteen. She was an only child; her father, who had been dead a dozen years, had left a large fortune, and she and her mother lived a life of indolence and luxury.

She and Mary Lee were, at the moment, the most intimate friends in the world, and yet two girls could hardly have been more different fundamentally. Mary was a girl of much good sense and of fine principles, though for the time being she was riding high on the

wave of superficiality. Released from school and playing the game of débutantism, she was playing it for all it was worth, knowing its frothiness as well as she knew that success at it was worth while, just as winning any game was worth while. Dozens of men attracted her, but she did not fool herself into believing that she loved, or ever would love, any of them. She was not prudish, but she kept in the open; dark corners knew her not, no swain ever held her hand or kissed her or held her close when he danced with her or said to her when they were alone what he would not have said when others could hear.

Jean Vance was not beautiful, neither her features nor her complexion possessed the softness or delicacy which provides feminine beauty, but she was far from being homely. There was a quality in her, and it was to be seen in her face, which attracted men strongly. She was never to have broad popularity among men, but she was to have many more very serious suitors than most girls have. Just what that quality of hers was, just wherein lay her lure is hard to say. She was the incarnation of sex; sex was in her eyes and in the glances she shot from them; it was in her lips and in her voice; certainly it was in her body.

She was tall and her figure was fine, although almost too well developed for a girl of her age. She stood very straight, her shoulders were broad and square, her back flat, her bosom full; her hips curved from her waist in perfect lines, her arms and hands were long and well formed. She had every sign of great strength and health. Her hair was brown and silky and luxuriant, setting off the fine poise of her head splendidly.

Thus it may seem that her lure lay in the physical woman, and yet among the men who wooed her were many who must surely have desired more in a wife than

a beautiful body. She was an enthusiastic but not unusually skilful athlete. She had no great desire to shine as a belle; she preferred to play with one man at a time and to play seriously; she appreciated her ability to attract men, but she had no desire to reward them for the compliment of their surrender to her charm or lure or whatever it was. She enjoyed their infatuation and she enjoyed sending them away heartbroken. She enjoyed immensely the final scene.

At nineteen she had experienced those sensations only in a small degree; she had been offered only puppy love with no chance of positive declarations, but even that was worth while and good practice and a sign of what the future held. She had a pretty good idea of what she wanted in the future. She might marry when she was thirty, certainly not before.

Jean had always liked most the men, or boys, whose emotions she could sway; others afforded her little amusement. She could not do anything at all with Ben, and accordingly should have cared nothing for him, yet she was fascinated. He frightened her just a little, he shook her confidence in herself, but he thrilled her nevertheless. Perhaps, for the first time, the spirit of the chase was aroused in her. She was destined to see a good deal of him during those ten days at Christmas, but one can't make much headway in ten days against such odds. Yet ten days of Ben Thorpe made their mark on her, a deep and lasting mark. Perhaps her intuition, if not the clear evidence, told her that she had found a man against whom her lure was very close to being ineffective. She was, of course, very young to be affected seriously by such a conception, but she looked upon Ben Thorpe and his fascination for her very seriously.

On the other hand, Ben was instantly repelled by her. He saw at a glance what a splendid animal she was and

he had an innate enthusiasm for fine bodies. Mrs. Williams, in Brookline, was like her to that extent and he had immediately had a curious admiration for Mrs. Williams, though that sort of admiration had always before been roused by the male human. There was nothing about her to detract from that sensation of pleasure, she was a sweet, gracious lady, with purity written large all over her.

But when Ben saw Jean Vance there flashed across his mind memories of years long before when he had known immoral women. He made no analysis: the sensation, the belief was instinctive. Jean's eyes and mouth and voice cried aloud to him of passion that her heart knew nothing of, a passion that was wild and uncontrollable and yet cruel and calculating, a passion which had no redeeming feature.

Ben, too, was very young to receive and hold so strong and exact an impression; yet it would have been impossible for him not to do so, even if he had attempted to reason against it. Jean Vance had been carefully brought up and as carefully educated, she had been watched over and guarded; her own mother, her friends, her mother's friends had no such idea of her as Ben had instantly. Ben's admiration for the physical woman was lost in his loathing for the woman herself.

Chance brought them together, alone, after a week's methodical evasion on Ben's part. All the Lees were away from the house; Austen had gone to do an errand, Mary had gone out to lunch and had not returned. Jean came for Mary, they were going somewhere together, and she found Ben alone in the library. She sat down and they talked for a few minutes. It would be better to say that Jean talked, on entirely impersonal subjects, such as the snow and the thaw had spoiled the skating, the attraction of Florida in the winter, and squash at the

Alden Club. It was hard going even for that able conversationalist and she soon broached the subject that was uppermost in her mind. She took the leap straightforwardly.

"Why don't you like girls?" she asked. "Mary says you don't."

Ben writhed. What reasonable answer could he make to such a question? He looked straight at her and his lips formed themselves into what was not a smile.

"Why don't you? You must have some reason," Jean pressed the point.

"I have never known girls very much."

"You must have. You know Mary, don't you?" Jean smiled. "And you know me. Why don't you like me?"

"Just what do you want me to say?" Ben spoke in no good temper. "I'll say anything that will please you, within reason."

"I don't want you to say anything if you don't want to, but I do hate grouchy old bears."

Jean was sitting up straight in a low deep arm-chair. Ben rose and went and stood close to her and she sank back and looked up at him. She was pretty sure that something was going to happen, there was a curious expression of determination on his face. Her arms were on the broad arms of the chair and as he stepped beside her she dropped her right arm to her lap. It was a movement that gave him permission to sit on the arm of the chair. He sat down and his hand reached across and rested on her hand which was on the other arm.

He remained so a moment, watching her eyes. She was sure then what was going to happen. She was surprised and pleased and thrilled. She breathed hard, color came into her cheeks, and she waited. Ben touched her cheek, and then her eyelids with the fingers of his free hand.

Jean Vance was never to know what Ben had intended to do. She would have let him kiss her if he had tried to do it; she liked being kissed in most circumstances, and she would have enjoyed especially having the bear want to kiss her. But as it turned out she was not to know what Ben had been going to say or do to her.

He stayed as he was for what seemed to her a very long time. His eyes remained on hers; they were cold and seemed to be studying her intently. His expression was cold, there was no suggestion in it that he was about to make a little love to her. When he had sat down she was sure he was going to do that, now she wondered. Finally her eyes dropped under his intense gaze. She was annoyed at being kept in suspense.

Ben's hand dropped to her shoulder and closed hard about it; his other hand closed over her wrist. She did not know why he did those things and was wondering what she should do about it when she heard the front door close and heard Austen call; she knew that Austen would be in the room immediately.

She attempted to release herself from Ben's grasp and found herself unable to move an inch. Her conscience was not clear, she did not want Austen to find her in that position; she knew that he would believe that the whole thing was her doing.

"Let me go!" It was more entreaty than command.

"What are you ashamed of?"

She made one more ineffectual effort to free herself and sank back in the chair, relaxed, and at that moment Austen came into the room. Jean burst into laughter.

"Oh, Austen, why did you come and spoil it all?" she cried. "Your old bear was just going to try to kiss me and I was going to——"

"Teach him his lesson," Austen said. He was surprised and in doubt as to the real situation.

"I 've been looking at Miss Vance's eyes, Ben said. "Have you ever noticed them?"

"I never see anything else when she 's around," Austen answered.

"Come look at them now." Austen came close and looked down at Jean. "What do you see?" Ben asked.

"Beauty and sweetness, a bit of a flirt, a bit of a devil, a little——"

"You see danger, son, the greatest danger in the world and if you 're wise you 'll run away from it, you 'll keep going till you 're dead-sure it can't catch you."

Austen laughed and walked away to the fireplace, where he knocked the ashes from his pipe. Jean smiled, she liked the compliment which Ben paid the light that was in her eyes. She had been watching Austen, now she looked up at Ben and what she saw frightened her; he had paid her no compliment.

"I meant what I said, even if Austen does n't know it," he muttered, so low that Austen could not hear. Then he got up from the arm of her chair and walked away.

Jean hated him; she hated him with all her heart and soul and so curious a thing was her hate that she loved him. It has been said that love and hate are often close to the same thing, so perhaps Jean's condition was not so strange after all. Ben had made his mark on her and it was to stay on her for many a long year; the grim silent boy understood her, and he fascinated her. She wanted to conquer him, she wanted him to become a slave to the lure that even then she knew was hers. She was ambitious, he would be a fine feather in her cap, the more difficult the game was to bring down, the greater the joy of the chase and of bringing down the game.

Mary rushed in and rushed out, taking Jean with her, leaving Austen and Ben alone.

"You don't mean to say that you've found a girl you like?" Austen asked, in a bantering tone.

"Are we going to play squash?"

"How about the first question?" Austen was still grinning.

"How about squash?" Ben repeated his question.

"She's a corker, is n't she?"

Ben faced him squarely. "Did n't I tell you to look at her eyes? Did you think I was joking when I told you to run from eyes like hers? Look at her eyes and look at your sisters'; if you don't see the difference you're blind. Watch your step. Perhaps I'm a cad to talk like that, I would n't talk that way to any one but you, but—but watch yourself; let her play her game with somebody else. Come on, let's go."

Austen's fingers were bending the leaves of a magazine on the table. He did not quite understand what Ben meant, and yet Ben was confirming a curious impression that he had had all that week, an impression that there was something queer about Jean Vance, something unpleasantly queer. There was something about her eyes that there was not about his sisters' and the eyes of other girls he knew. He had never noticed it before that vacation time; perhaps it had been there always and he was just beginning to understand.

"Let's play squash and have a swim," he said. The two boys looked at each other for a moment, one trying to discover whether or not he had hurt his friend, the other considering what he was very sure was close to a deep uncanny insight in the other.

They both smiled, their mutual confidence and respect was complete, and then, without a word, they put on their coats and hats and went out. They walked rapidly to the Alden Club, talking of other things on the way. They

played a hard game, swam in the pool, and returned for dinner, hungry and happy.

The last week of the Christmas vacation passed quickly; cold weather came again, and skating with it, and occupied most of Austen's and Ben's time during daylight hours. Ben drove Austen to his dinners and dances and himself stayed at home to read or to play with Dr. and Mrs. Lee, sometimes with Elizabeth for the fourth. Bridge had just come into vogue and the Lees were delving into its intricacies.

Hope, the quiet, dark, big-eyed child, was frankly devoted to Ben. With intuition that was remarkable for so young a girl she did not force herself upon him, but waited patiently for his invitations, formal and informal, to affairs of moment or to a quiet chat in his lap. Ben took her to a children's play at a theater and she was in the seventh heaven; he skated with her and discussed important matters with her.

The time for his departure on the night train came after dinner, and after her bedtime. She said good-by in a most dignified and lady-like manner, saying that she hoped he would come again very soon, and went upstairs to bed. An hour later Ben went up for his bag and was fumbling for it in the dim light from a hall lamp when he heard the patter of bare feet. He turned and faced the tiny girl in her nightgown. She held up her arms and Ben picked her up; she snuggled against his shoulder and said never a word.

"You're a bad girl; you ought to have been asleep long ago."

"I stayed awake to hear you go; I heard you come upstairs."

"Suppose some one should catch you here?"

"S'pose they did!" the child whispered.

"Breaking rules."

"It's a special occasion." It unquestionably was.

"I won't let anybody chop your head off or anything like that."

"Foolish."

"Where do you live? I know, down the hall, up two steps, room on the right. Sssh! I'm going to put you to bed and lock you in."

A bare arm went about Ben's neck. "Is n't any lock on the bed."

"How about the door?"

"How about the window?"

"Big jump, and it's cold outside."

"Silly!"

"How dare you call me silly?"

"You are, you know you are."

"I got you back here without anybody catching you." They were in her room.

"I would n't care if they did."

"I'm not so sure of that. In you go."

She went in, all but her head and arms. Her arms stayed around Ben's neck. She whispered in his ear: "Good-by. You'll come again just as soon as you can, won't you?"

"I surely will. Will you invite me sometime?"

"Silly!"

"There you go again. You're not a bit respectful. Think how old I am."

She chuckled at that. Ben kissed her.

"Good-by. Be a good girl."

"'Night."

"'Night."

Ben was at the door. She called to him. "Come back, just a minute." He came. "Be a good boy."

"You young rascal!"

Another kiss and Ben was gone.

Ben went back to Cambridge with work to do. For a boy of reasonable intelligence to pass his examinations is not difficult. Regular attendance at lectures, a little thought, and a little reading will do the trick, and there will be plenty of time left for what is called "college life." Of course if a student is to be a credit to himself and the college, he must do more than that. Ben wished to do more than that; it seemed to him worth while in itself and he knew that if his father were alive it would please him.

He had been in college only three months and he had not gotten the hang of the thing. The first half-year is a formative period; it takes a boy as long as that under the best of conditions to grasp the way things are done, to get the proper perspective, to get some idea of values. During the first two months Ben, try as he would, had found it very difficult if not impossible to study hard. Hackett, years before, had spoken of his ability to concentrate upon whatever was before him and that power had increased as the years passed, but the excitement of football, the responsibility which his college-mates and the alumni insisted was his, and the dead-tiredness of the evenings had been too much for him. He had not kept up in his work.

When football was over his father's death had come, causing a week's absence from college, and then days of terrible despondency during which his brain refused to act. It had required his fight with Forbes to clear his brain and when it was cleared he had gone, almost immediately, to Alden with Austen.

Now he had come back resolved to work and work hard and he set about it. It was a pleasant task and he reveled in it. The acquisition of knowledge had always

been a joy to him and now he had the opportunity of acquiring it under ideal conditions; the only limitations were his own capacity for assimilating it. He carried Austen along with him; they were taking the same courses and their association in study was as pleasant as it was in everything else.

They took their exercise together methodically. Ben smiled and was charitable when Austen took nights off for his parties. Austen's guns were spiked; he could not now urge Ben to go out into society, but he resolved that the next year Ben, by hook or crook, should be made to do so.

For a month Ben abandoned all pursuits but work and exercise. He was very serious about it all, and his face, always grim and set in firm lines, became more severe than ever. An unpleasant condition of affairs accentuated his demeanor. His fellows desired greatly to make a hero of him. His football alone would have caused that, but the story of his affair with Forbes had become common knowledge in the university, and college students, being human males, admired more than anything in the world a man who could fight with his two fists.

Ben had no pride in the licking he had given Forbes. He wanted to forget it and to have others forget it, he wanted no adulation, no hero-worship, he detested the thought of it. His defense against it was to become cold and reserved and unresponsive to their advances.

It began to be said that Thorpe was a grouch; it was also said that his head was swelled. Some, who said nothing, thought that there was something in what others said. A few, who knew Ben, looked at things in a very different light.

It is, or once upon a time it was, the habit of certain people to refer to Harvard as a rich man's college. As well might the United States be called a rich man's coun-

try. In Ben's day—and presumably the conditions have not greatly changed since—an observer standing at the doorway of a large lecture room as the class passed through it, would have been hard put to it to find evidence of wealth in one of every ten students, perhaps in one of every fifty. New York once upon a time could produce only its Four Hundred out of some millions; Harvard could boast a little larger percentage, perhaps, but very little larger. Within its sacred precincts were gathered together a conglomeration of youth from the highways and byways of the world, all sorts and conditions of men. A certain very small element advertised itself and was advertised gratuitously; the rest, as a class, was very seldom heard of, nor did it desire to be heard of; it was content with obscurity and peace, it had ideals and ambitions; to be heard of in later years was its desire.

Among this class was a tall, thin, angular, cadaverous man named Thaddius Octavius Thrall. Ben saw him first one autumn day when the sun was shining bright from the west. Thrall was going eastward on a bicycle and the sun's rays fell full upon his black coat, the long tails of which flopped and flapped out behind. He was a humorous figure in himself, almost a caricature of a man, but, funnier than that, so highly polished by wear was his black coat that the sun was reflected from it in brilliant flashes, almost equal in intensity to those of a mirror in the hands of a playful small boy. Thaddius Octavius Thrall flashed fire as he rode down the street.

Ben watched him until he turned a corner and disappeared. "Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered. "I would n't have thought it possible. I wonder who the old duck is." Ben remembered the old black coat that Hackett had worn. "Whoever he is, I don't suppose he wears that coat because he admires it."

Two months later, through the rearrangement of a lecture course, the alphabetical proximity of "Thorpe" and "Thrall" put Ben and the shiny coat in adjoining seats. Not more than a dozen men in the university knew anything of Thrall; hardly more than a dozen did not know Thorpe at least by sight and something about him. Among those few was Thrall.

The first day he said, "Good morning," to Ben, and Ben replied in kind. They repeated the formality every day for a week and then Thrall made a remark on an academic subject; thereafter discussions between them on academic subjects became frequent. Thrall apparently had no other interests. At first he did little more than arouse Ben's curiosity; he was a bit pedantic, his words rather formal, as though he were being very careful to live up to a high and unnatural manner of speech which he had set for himself. It was very evidently not a sign of any assumed superiority but an honest effort to do the right thing as he saw it.

One day Ben lost him as usual in the crowd leaving the hall, but met him again on the steps and walked across the Yard with him. Thrall spoke of a book which he wanted very much to read and said that the demand for it at the library had been so great that, "as yet," he had not been able to obtain it.

"I have it," Ben said. "I'll lend it to you."

Thrall was very much pleased at the offer, so pleased that he found it difficult to express his thanks; even so he went much further than was necessary.

"Won't you come in?" Ben suggested. "I'll give it to you now."

Thrall went in, as far as the doorway, and stuck there. He was certainly a stranger in a strange land. Ben, his curiosity working strong, asked Thrall to come in and

sit down. This time Thrall sat on the edge of a chair, without taking off his hat or coat. Both the hat and coat were fit mates for the shiny tail coat beneath.

"Do you smoke?" Ben asked.

"That is a luxury which I have been forced to forego," Thrall said, as though the sacrifice for a great cause had been a pleasure rather than otherwise. The confession had pathos in it for Ben, the man's penury was very evident.

"There's tobacco in that jar," Ben pointed. "Try it; there are pipes on the table."

"It was extremely difficult to break myself of the habit. Having done so, I hesitate to—to—if I smoke now I shall have to go through it all over again." That placed Ben in an awkward position and he was considering the way out when Thrall said, "The flesh is weak, I cannot resist." He filled a pipe and lighted it and his pleasure was great, even if it was lessened by thoughts of temptation to be resisted later on. He took off his hat and coat and sank into an arm-chair.

Curious as the man was in appearance, there was something attractive about him. He was evidently enthusiastic over college, he was perhaps something of a dreamer; honesty and a considerable degree of intelligence were written clear on his face.

"You're not a freshman, of course," Ben said. Thrall was at least twenty-five years old.

"Yes, indeed, I am. It took me a long time to get here. I was afraid I never should get here, but here I am at last."

He told Ben in general then and in detail later on how he had gotten to Harvard. He was the son of a minister in a village in the Middle West. He had gone through a school of no great merit and then had had a year's preparation in some nondescript institution for a career

of teaching. For five years he had taught school under what he described as the most regrettable conditions. His ambition was to go through Harvard. To that end he saved; in five years, three or four hundred dollars; then a distant relative left him about a thousand and here he was with his bicycle, his dreams, and his wardrobe, which had reached the irreducible minimum if he was to appear in public. The world was a desert, Cambridge an oasis. His absolutely minimum fixed expenses per year, multiplied by four, almost exactly equaled his total capital. He was working out a large part of his board and lodging by manual and clerical labor for a lady far down Holyoke Street.

Thrall spent an hour with Ben that day, an hour which Ben enjoyed. It gave him, besides the pleasure of the moment, some idea of the sacrifices a man may make for the sake of an education, and it made him appreciate the comfort of his own circumstances. Thrall promised to come again.

Ben told Austen about him. "He 's the queerest old coot you ever saw," he said, "and a liberal education in comparative values, if you get what I mean."

"I don't, except the coot part."

"I mean he gives you a mighty good idea of what 's important to one man and is n't to another. I don't believe he knows we played Yale last year. Maybe he does."

Ben arranged for Austen to meet "the old coot," and Austen was rewarded with a highly intellectual evening during which Thrall smoked continually. "It is necessary for my nerves, it quiets them," he said. "That is an excuse; I have no nerves, I like tobacco. I like it so much that I am willing to sacrifice my self-respect and smoke my friends' tobacco, when I cannot buy my own.

Somehow I shall find a way, some day, not to repay but to show my appreciation."

Ben laughed at him. "Come here whenever you like and smoke your head off," he said. They had become well acquainted by then. "Once upon a time I had to bum board and lodging to get them at all. My friends Angelo Teti and Dolan the stable-man would say helping a man to a smoke was little enough to do. I've bummed all my life, Thrall. I lived in slum streets when I was a kid and it was only by a miracle that I ever got away from them. I'm telling you that so you'll understand how I feel about some things."

"You mean—I do not understand—it seems impossible that you should have—"

"But it's so nevertheless."

Austen, in the corner, saw Thrall trying to comprehend. He knew that there was from that moment a strong bond between Ben and Thrall.

When Thrall was gone Austen said, "That old boy of yours is a wonder."

"What's wonderful about him?" Ben asked.

"How do I know? But I'll bet he's got fine stuff in him; he's got a mind, anybody can see that."

"He needs fattening up, and some warm clothes."

"And tobacco—or money to buy it," Austen added.

"Exactly, but what can be done about it? You can't offer charity to a man like that, can you?"

"There must be something that can be done about it. Imagine trying to go through Harvard on four hundred dollars a year! Maybe it can be done; I don't know. But I do know that he'll be lucky if he gets his money's worth. With another four or five hundred he'd get ten times as much out of it."

"I'm going to have a chat with the Dean," Ben said. "He's a wise old boy; maybe he can give us a hint."

CHAPTER VIII

LATE in January the Grays in Brookline asked Austen and Ben to spend the next week-end with them. The invitation was given to Austen, who accepted it and then told Ben about it.

"It's all right," he said. "It's just family. There won't be any girls there; we'll play bridge and go skating and be comfortable."

Ben made no great objection. It was, as Austen said, just family, and it was, accordingly, a pleasant change and comfortable. The Grays, understanding the boy, took good care not to broach irritating subjects; there were plenty that were not irritating. One of them was Thaddius Octavius Thrall.

Sunday morning they sent the boys to the Country Club to skate on the pond in the woods. They promised to arrive, themselves, in time for lunch. Ben and Austen found an impromptu hockey game in progress and joined it. That over, they were skating about leisurely when a young lady of tender years upset with a crash and Ben lifted her to her feet. She was quite sure that she was not hurt, only jarred. Her mother, some distance away, saw the accident and skated toward them quickly. By that time the young lady was certain that the jarring was not at all serious. When that was settled, and not until then, the mother recognized Ben and Austen. She was Mrs. Williams whom in the autumn they had met at the Grays'.

It has already been said that Mrs. Williams was a woman of great beauty, of greater charm, and of much good sense. She had been, some years before, highly proficient at athletic sports; even now, when she was the mother of four girls, Mrs. Williams skated with expertness and remarkable grace, as Ben discovered immediately. They began to talk of skating and drifted away to a secluded part of the pond. Ben had discovered that the art of skating was much further advanced in Boston than in Lanville or Alden; not only were youths much more proficient at hockey but figure-skating, even in very complicated forms, was done as a matter of course by almost every one, both men and women. Ben, well founded in the fundamentals and possessing a knack for things athletic, was rapidly picking up the finer points of the sport.

Mrs. Williams, after skating with Ben for half an hour, asked him if he waltzed.

"I have never danced in my life," he said.

"I mean on the ice."

"Not even on the ice."

"It's time you learned. It's very simple and awfully good fun. Let me show you. Mr. Lee, please whistle a waltz, loud."

Mrs. Williams fitted her arms into Ben's and Austen made some attempt to provide music. The lady gave Ben his instructions and then guided him backward and forward, on inner edge and outer edge. He got the hang of it quickly, it was ridiculously easy. Mrs. Williams, smiling at Austen, said that real music made a lot of difference. Then she had an idea:

"Why don't you both bring me to the carnival, Thursday night? Come to dinner and spend the night, so you won't have to go back to Cambridge. Mr. Williams is a very satisfactory husband in a great many ways, but he

won't skate. There 'll be a band then. You will come, won't you?"

As was becoming the custom, Austen accepted promptly for them both.

"I 'll get two nice girls to come too," Mrs. Williams added.

"Ben 's scared to death of girls," Austen said.

"Won't you do for my girl?" Ben asked.

Mrs. Williams smiled and Austen laughed. "That 's the first time since I 've known him that he ever said anything as strong as that," he said.

"You 're not scared to death of an old lady like me, are you? Suppose I just get a girl for Mr. Lee."

That was the way of it. Thursday night was in itself perfect for skating and the Country Club added to its perfection by furnishing various and sundry things to eat and drink, lights about the pond, a huge bonfire, and a band and a hurdy-gurdy which, dovetailing, provided continuous music. The scene was a gala one.

Ben met his Waterloo that night and his Waterloo was Mrs. Williams. By no possible stretch of the imagination could he discover in her any unpleasant quality. She was, he thought, very much like Austen's mother. Whereas other women were a constant source of annoyance, an everlasting irritation, playing the part of cat to his dog, Mrs. Williams was soothing. She gave him a very distinct sensation of pleasure; her beauty, her voice and her smile were a joy to him.

At first that night they went at their waltzing slowly and at arms' length until Ben got the hang of it, but before an hour had passed they were skating as dozens of other couples were skating all about them. It is true that a man and woman may waltz, indoors or out, with the utmost skill and yet find that their skill has some small peculiarity about it which prevents their dancing together

with complete satisfaction. On the other hand, certain men and women seem made to order for each other and so it was with Ben and Mrs. Williams. She confessed the fact, happily.

"You're simply wonderful," she said. "I can't believe that you've never done it before."

"Don't you think it's at least nine tenths you? No matter what mistakes I make you seem to see them coming and do the right thing."

"That's not so. I know that you're very skilful at other sports, you do this naturally, I suppose. It's an inborn gift, I imagine."

"It is with you, certainly."

They were having a little love-feast off in a corner.

"Will you dance with me, indoors, sometime?" she asked.

"You don't know what you're asking. I've never danced in my life."

"What!" Mrs. Williams could not believe that. Ben had told her so before, but the other time her mind had been on skating.

"That's perfectly true."

"Then you've got to learn, that's all there is to it!" she exclaimed. "You can't go through college without going to dances; you'd miss half the fun."

"Somehow it's never been my idea of fun," Ben said.

"Have you ever tried?"

"No, I never have."

"Then how do you know? What's the trouble? Are you really scared to death of girls?"

"I don't know just what it is, exactly. We don't seem to get along very well together."

"That's perfect nonsense. I'm going to teach you how to dance, it won't be hard to do; you'll learn quickly and then you've got to behave."

Ben looked at Mrs. Williams with his face set in its hard lines. He shook his head slowly. "I don't believe so," he said.

"You silly, silly boy!" Mrs. Williams exclaimed. "What are girls for but to amuse men until they marry 'em? I suppose you're never, never going to be married?"

"I don't know," Ben said. "Not for a while, anyway."

"But you'll come to the next carnival, won't you?"

"I will," Ben said, smiling.

In the meantime Austen had found entirely to his liking the girl whom Mrs. Williams had provided for him.

Ben and Austen went to the next carnival, and to every one till warm weather put an end to them. Ben skated at other times, besides, with Mrs. Williams. Already his admiration for her was very great and his affection deep. Both were to increase with the passing of years.

The rest of Ben's freshman year held nothing of great importance. It did little but furnish a foundation for the future, which was quite enough.

He and Austen had a grave question to decide between them: should they row or play baseball? The problem was not as easy of solution as might be supposed. Neither Ben nor Austen had ever rowed, both had played on their school nines. They discussed the matter seriously in Austen's room before the grate fire when the cold wind howled outside and the snow lay deep.

"I'll never make a ball-player," Austen said. "I was pretty rotten even in school, and you know what that means."

"You never can tell," Ben said. "Maybe you'll come with a rush and be a wonder."

"There's mighty little chance of that," Austen replied, "and, anyway, rowing's a better game."

"How do you make that out?" Ben demanded. "You work like hell for five months, out on the water, rain or shine, getting cussed steady for two or three hours a day. At the end of it you row one race that turns you inside out, and that's the end of the party. If you're on the nine you play a couple of games a week and have some good trips and the hardest work you have to do is to run round the bases when you make home runs. Also, you play to a big crowd and get cheered and all that sort of thing, if you're any good or luck is with you in the pinches."

"That's all right for you, you'll be the Varsity pitcher some day. I'll get canned."

"You'll probably get canned sooner if you go out for the crew."

"Yes, I know that, but there's something about the crew that's different. I don't know what it is, but everybody recognizes it just the same."

Neither boy was ready to confess that the main thing, whatever they did, was to do it together.

"I saw Claflin talking to you the other day," Austen said. Claflin was captain of the university nine. "I suppose he was signing you up as a candidate?"

"He was trying to."

"Did he know that you struck me out three times in one game last spring?" Austen asked.

Ben grinned. "He didn't mention it, but he seemed to know my pedigree pretty well. I suppose that's part of his job. There have been half a dozen of 'em round in the interests of baseball."

"And naturally they'll grease the ways for you. If you went out for the crew you'd be just one of the mob, like me."

"They tell me it's a funny thing about rowing,—you never can tell who's going to make a good oar. Fellows who can do everything else well can't row for sour beans and some of the best oarsmen can't do a thing outside of the boat. And rowing sure is hard work, with mighty little glory in it. Why, if the crew fellows did n't wear their dinky little caps with the oars on 'em, hardly anybody 'd know they 'd ever seen a shell."

"There must be something in it when so many men go out for the crew," Ansten said.

"Yes, I guess there is. What you say we try it?"

"You! Do you mean to say you're willing to give up a practically sure place on the nine some day to take a chance on rowing, with the mob? You'd make the nine next year anyway: I know a pitcher when I see one."

"Maybe, you never can tell, but there's something different about the crew. Let's try it."

Pleased as he was, Ansten was not quite convinced that Ben was not sacrificing too much for a will-o'-the-wisp, but Ben's mind was made up.

"You stroke and I'll row seven, son. We'll call that settled," Ben said, and Ansten grinned happily.

They went out for the crew, which ceremony consisted of attending a meeting in a dimly lighted hall where they listened to discourses on courage, duty, and hard work and a lot of other virtues, and signed their names on slips of paper. There followed setting-up exercises in the boat-house, work on the machines and in the tank, and jaunts across country. By the time the crews went on the water the two hundred odd candidates had been reduced to sixty or seventy. Thereafter the axe fell with frequency till the big cut came after the races between the Weld and Newell crews. Then Ben and Ansten were among the twenty that still stuck. Ansten's prospects were bright, he showed unmistakable signs of


having the makings of a stroke in him. Ben was at five in the second row and was hoping for the best.

In the meantime things had been straightened out for Theodorus Octavius Thrall. The Dean had said that nothing much could be done for him that year, but if Thrall proved that he was worthy something might be done for the years following. This was explained to Thrall and he accepted the news calmly. It did not urge him on to greater effort; he was doing everything, as it was, that mere man could do.

It was very evident that Thrall craved companionship. He had had no time for social affairs, however simple, and would have found it difficult to find them if he had gone about it methodically. He had lived a very lonely life since he arrived at Cambridge, but in the enthusiasm engendered by the accomplishment of his great ambition he had thought little of it. That could not keep on for long; human nature would not have it so.

Ben, and then Austen, offered him the companionship he craved. He was sure that they could give him much more than he could give them and that he must be at best to some small extent a subject not of financial charity of course but of social charity. His delicacy of feeling was such that he resolved that they must take the initiative so far as their relations were concerned; he would not force himself upon them. They understood his attitude and liked him the more for it.

They took the initiative and Thrall, his conscience clear, expanded like a flower in the warm sun. He was provincial, in many a way the world was a brand-new place to him; the manners and customs of Cambridge were very, very different from those of his little western town, and to become accustomed to the new conditions, to fit himself into his new niche, to assume a natural and



comfortable place in the new order of things was not a task for a pleasant afternoon. If he accomplished it in the four years of his college life he would do well.

Narrow as his education and experience had been, there was a very positive suggestion of broad-mindedness about him.

"He seems to know the devil of a lot about all sorts of things," Ben said to Austen.

"He's read an awful lot of deep stuff, and he seems to understand it," Austen suggested.

"And he knows how to explain it in words of one syllable."

That, in truth, was Thrall's outstanding characteristic. He had an unusually pleasant voice; it was low and deep and yet very distinct and he could make it do all sorts of curious things that tickled the ears of his hearers. His words at times were studied and his language stilted, but his voice was entirely natural. And, whether he discussed college work, his own views of life, or subjects extraneous to both he had a remarkable faculty for saying what he had to say very clearly and simply. If he understood a subject it seemed to be the easiest thing in the world for him to make others understand it.

This ability became very evident when he spent two or three evenings with Ben and Austen, putting the finishing touches on their preparation for the midyear examinations.

"Give him half a chance and he'll be a marvel. Would n't he make a crackerjack lecturer?" Austen said.

"All the chance he needs is real food and time to mix with the crowd," Ben answered. "A few hundred dollars would do it, a tenth of what lots of men around here spend a year."

Slowly Thrall's acquaintance broadened among Ben's and Austen's friends; while that may have been to some

extent a sign of Harvard's democracy, it was proof that Thrall, under his coating of unsophistication, had an attractive personality. Thrall learned quickly that it was not only entirely unnecessary but highly undesirable to speak in any but his natural way, and as a result his suggestion of pedantry and his slow, carefully thought out form of speech dropped from him forever. His language soon became as free and easy as that of Ben and his friends, which made life easier for Thrall; the other thing had been something of a burden.

Dr. Lee came to Boston for a few days early in March, and during that time met Thrall. The young man's Lincolnian figure, his unquestionably keen intellect, his enthusiasm in his search for knowledge and his ambition, which knew no faltering, impressed the doctor greatly. Most of the facts Dr. Lee gathered at first hand, the rest Austen furnished when Thrall had taken his departure. To Dr. Lee, Thrall's poverty and the handicap it placed on him were pathetic.

"Do you suppose he would accept assistance from a friend?" the doctor asked.

That of course was a question. The father and son and Ben discussed it at length and in the end the boys agreed that it could do little if any harm to make the offer.

They made it a few days later and it took a week of concentrated effort to make Thrall accept, and even then he succumbed not so much because he was convinced as because he broke down under the entreaties of his friends.

As a result of his decision he acquired a civilized suit of clothes and a pair of serviceable boots and a room fit to live in; he took his meals in Memorial Hall, where the food was plentiful and wholesome. He further allowed himself a ration of tobacco and purchased a few much needed books. He was able to work with an unworried

mind; he had a few moments a day in which he could loaf.

Thrall had little idea that he was hobnobbing with men who were very important in his class; nor would he have been greatly impressed by the fact if he had realized it. "Important" is a dangerous word to use in connection with a freshman or, for that matter, with any undergraduate. Thrall's natural place, at least for a long time to come, would have been in the submerged half, low down among those never heard of, the obscure mob having none of the ambition to shine in those affairs of college life which are not connected with scholarly pursuits, which ambition is so characteristic of the upper half.

As a result of the alphabetical proximity of "Thrall" to "Thorpe" he had come to know Ben and thereafter Ben's friends. If these friends were not prominent, then, they were to achieve prominence later on, whatever that prominence may have amounted to. They were athletes, nearly all of them,—clean-living, broad-minded, straightforward youths,—and if Thrall was, at first, a grotesque figure among them, it is the more to his credit that he did not long remain so.

Austen and Ben and Thrall passed their midyear examinations, Thrall with the highest grades possible, Ben with very high grades, and Austen with marks of which he was proud. Only Thrall's standing was of real moment; his success in college and his happiness were to depend, apparently, solely upon academic achievements.

Spring came upon Cambridge and no place on the face of God's green earth can be fairer in springtime than Cambridge when it chooses, and that spring Cambridge behaved.

During it one problem solved itself and another had

to be solved. Problem number one was the matter of Ben's rowing. One burly youngster was fired from college for cause and another developed a heart that was not up to the strain of rowing, and Thorpe, who was no genius at the game but the best oar available, went to Five in the freshman crew and stayed there. Austen, who, many hoped, had aquatic genius, stroked and when the thing was settled beyond all reasonable doubt the two of them were satisfied.

"There's no game like it in the world," Ben said. "I don't suppose it will ever happen,—ever, ever, ever,—but I sure would like to row in the Varsity some day. Think of it, kid, you stroking and me rowing seven and beating Yale!"

Austen grinned. "Dream away while the dreaming's good. Maybe you'll get the reward you deserve for giving up baseball. Suppose we'd gone the other way; you'd have been a star sure as shootin' and I'd be playing tennis for exercise."

"Whereas now you're the best stroke that's turned up here for a coon's age. Oh, rats, you never can tell! I might have been a frost at baseball, you may go wrong as a stroke; there's nothing to do but keep trying and hope for the best."

That was the problem that settled itself then and thereafter. The problem that had to be solved was Ben's summer.

"There's nothing to it," Austen said. "Father and Mother expect you, they want you; they say you're an influence for good with me, besides being fond of you for your own sweet sake. They volunteered the information, without my saying a word, that they hoped I'd ask you and that you'd come."

"But, good Lord, man! I can't bum on you for three months."

"Well, then, make a deal with Mother for board and lodging; try it on and see where you get off. You won't be noticed in that mob. My own feeling is that you'll pay your way by your simple presence; but go on, tell Mother how you feel about it and see what happens."

The two boys argued back and forth and in the end Ben gave in, just as Thrall had given in when charity was offered him.

The discipline of crew work was strict. Only on Sundays were the oarsmen allowed to wander from the training-table and then only with orders as to what might be eaten and when they must go to bed. The girl whom Mrs. Williams had provided for Austen on carnival nights and for days on the Charles had made a very favorable impression on him. He knew many girls, but it was evident that this one pleased him most of all. She was very young, hardly more than seventeen,—a pretty, quiet, sweet youngster who annoyed Ben not at all.

She lived next door to Mrs. Williams, with only a bit of lawn, a flower bed, and a few trees in between, and Ben saw no reason why he should not go to Brookline on Sunday afternoons and play with the Williams children on the grass while Austen played with fire next door. If sometimes other people were there too, even people of the feminine persuasion and young ones at that, Ben must make the best of it. He was, any way you looked at it, a very silly boy and the sooner he got over his queer ideas about girls the better it would be. Mrs. Williams explained that in detail.

Most boys in college have lady-loves, who, mostly, become only pleasant memories. Passing years, departure from Boston, and finally the sudden appearance of the one woman in the world wreck those college crushes most effectively. Of course there are exceptions.

Ben's only love while he was in college was Mrs. Williams, and the component parts of his love were admiration and affection. Not an atom of passion ever entered into it. She, out of all the women he knew or was to know in Boston, pleased him. His devotion was complete, but love as commonly spoken of never entered his head. Of course that sort of love for either one of them would have been absurd on the face of it. Ben knew nothing of it and Mrs. Williams had but one love.

Mr. Williams, the object of that love, liked Ben and Ben liked him. Mr. Williams was older than his wife, twice as old as Ben, and his life lay along intellectual lines; games and athletics interested him very little. He liked youth and a strong affection grew up between him and Ben and Austen. Before the boys went away for the summer they had found in the Williamses' house a thing which all boys need and should have,—something that is by way of being a home. It is a well-known phenomenon; other humans besides boys find it difficult to get along without the influence that exists only within the four walls of a family house.

Ben had plenty to do, his college affairs kept him busy as any boy should be, but there was always time once a week and sometimes twice to call upon the eldest Miss Williams, who was ten, and the youngest, who was two, and the pair in between, and to bask in the comfort and delicacy and refinement that only a good and high-bred woman can impart to crass materials. Ben gave no thought to cause and effect but accepted thankfully the Williamses' hospitality. Thereby was planted in him certain knowledge, to wit: that no man's life can be complete and entirely worth while unless he possesses a home in which to spend a goodly part of it. Ben knew nothing, then, of the planting of that knowledge, but it was in him just the same, to be recognized later on.

In June he went to New London, where otherwise perfect days were slightly marred by final examinations that had to be taken, in a tent, under a proctor who quite properly believed that hours spent under canvas were wasted. Having entire confidence in his charges, he wandered about outside in the sunshine.

The race was rowed and won. Then Ben and Austen and certain others went to New York and smoked their pipes at the Polo Grounds while the deciding baseball game with Yale was lost. Then they went straight to Millhampton.

Thrall got a job as conductor on a Boston trolley line, running to a well-known beach.

Once upon a time Hackett had said that if, when Ben was studying, a circus parade went along the street, the boy would be very likely not to notice it. That was undoubtedly an exaggeration, but the germ of a real idea was there. The boy did have a very remarkable power of concentration and the years increased it, as has been said before. He lacked, almost completely, interest in unimportant everyday affairs. When he was thinking about something or other he was very likely not to let anything short of a riot distract him. When he was walking along the street or through the Yard in a crowd he was more than likely to notice no one who passed him; sometimes he did not look at or think of even an individual he met free and clear of a throng. When he was walking with some one he thought of what he was saying to his companion and of nothing else.

As a result many men who knew him thought that he cut them intentionally or something close to it. The impression which he had created in the middle of the year, when he unconsciously threw a sort of reserve about

himself as a protection against hero-worship, increased. The hatred he had of "side" made him imagine that if he were not to make a fool of himself he not only must show no pride or elation over what he had done in the autumn but must avoid the subject altogether.

His face was naturally severe, many thought that it was hard and cruel; they said he was a brute. They went further and said he was a snob and conceited. How many thought and said those things is not important, they were a great many. Jealousy and envy, mixed with a lack of knowledge, are likely to jump at desired conclusions.

A great many more knew that none of those ideas about Ben was correct; they knew that he was far more reserved than most of them, that he lacked the sense of humor which makes certain kinds of skylarking enjoyable, that he was much more serious about things in general than the average college youth and that there was a grim determination about him. But they knew, too, that there was not an atom of conceit in him, that he had a big, warm heart, that he was democratic to the core, and that he had a very level head on his shoulders.

Ben's circle of intimate friends was not large. No thought of popularity ever entered his head, nor had he any such desire for social honors as most of his fellows had. He saw something of the toadying to upper classmen and of the wire-pulling that was going on and it disgusted him. The freshman elections which had brought the cliques out in the open made him understand something of college politics and pleased him not at all. He rather resented the established order of things.

But that side of Ben's college life is not important, his history as here told has to do with other matters. Honors came to him later on and he accepted them as a

matter of course, without enthusiasm. The main point is that many of his classmates, most of his classmates perhaps, and a lot of upper classmen thought that he was cold, hard, and heartless and entirely satisfied with himself.

CHAPTER IX

BEN had not been long at Millhampton before Mary readjusted her attitude toward him. She no longer looked upon him as a possible beau or as a grouchy old bear. He was a human being and he was to all intents and purposes a member of the family. Nothing would be gained by trying to like him or by disliking him, the thing to do was to be neutral; let him play with her and talk with her when it happened that way, neither evade him nor seek him out.

Thereby Mary showed her good sense; the result was pleasing to her and to Ben. He was n't of much use, but he did no harm. She was not a source of great pleasure, but she was not annoying.

Jean Vance came for two weeks. During them Ben drew into his shell and stayed there, while fire raged in Jean's breast. Dr. and Mrs. Lee saw Ben's frame of mind and while they did not understand it, and could not guess why Jean should affect him so, they were too wise to say anything about it. They knew, of course, that he was very far from being a ladies' man, but why he should dislike Jean Vance so intensely they had no idea.

Elizabeth went her serene way, untroubled; she was a calm young woman, who found the world pleasant and ran across no difficult problems to solve. Hope and Ben continued fast friends.

Ben and Austen went back to college early, for football practice. They went immediately to see Mr. and Mrs. Williams, and Austen, having said and done the conventional things, went across the lawn to the house next door, where the sweet, pretty little girl lived; she was expecting him.

Mrs. Williams, knowing that now Ben was free to go into society if he wished to, spoke to him on the subject.

"Are you still scared to death of girls?" she asked.

Ben, being under no restraint with Mrs. Williams, nodded. He could talk to her, without embarrassment, about things that he could not discuss with any one else.

"Is n't it really perfect nonsense?" she exclaimed. "Of course I know they don't frighten you, but why don't you like them? Why are you different from every other normal, sensible man? Do you actually dislike girls, or is it that you simply do not like them?—if you get the distinction."

"I get it, of course," Ben answered. "I don't know what it is, Mrs. Williams. Whatever it is, it started as far back as I can remember, when I was a kid on the streets in New York. You know I never really had a home until I was twelve years old, when my father found me and took me in. I remember that I hated women before that. Of course I never knew any women then, except—well, a pretty poor lot, the kind you never could know anything about. Some of them were bad women, most of them were just plain tough, women of the slums. They did n't care much for me and I suppose I reciprocated as a matter of course; I imagine it got to be a habit. I did hate them, right enough."

"But after that, after you went to Lanville?" Mrs. Williams asked.

"Mrs. Thorpe and I never got along very well. She did n't like boys, she never liked my being in her house.

She was a good woman, but she was as different from you as black is from white. I did n't realize it at the time, but the women in Lanville knew what I was; they knew where I came from, and I suppose I was a pretty tough customer. They did n't want to have anything to do with me; as I look back on it I don't blame them. Then I did n't care; I was glad of it, it saved lots of trouble." Ben smiled at Mrs. Williams. "I suppose they helped the habit along. Things changed after a while, but I did n't care; I don't know why, but I did n't. I had scraps with some of my women teachers and that did n't help any. Austen Lee does n't like tomatoes, he can't eat them to save his life." Ben smiled at the old comparison. "I suppose I'm an awful fool, but what's the use? My idea of a good time is n't playing with girls."

"Is it worse than that, sometimes?"

"Yes, it is."

Mrs. Williams looked at him intently for a moment, considering a question; a wave of color came in her face.

"You—like me, don't you, Ben?"

"Yes, you know I do."

"I'm not a bit different from other women, the sort of women you could know here if you wanted to."

"I think you must be. I know you are as far as I am concerned."

"Won't you take my word for it? Won't you try to get over your prejudice? I'm sure you could if you tried. Of course I knew perfectly well that women and girls, many of them, delight in sticking pins into men, but it does n't mean anything, it's just part of the game to keep men stirred up and to keep them interested. You'd get used to that in no time, and when you did you'd think nothing at all about it. Besides, lots of them don't do it; they're just as pleasant and friendly and natural as men. Don't you think that perhaps you're

like a boy who's afraid of the water when he can't swim? When he learns to swim he likes it. Honestly, I think you're losing an awful lot, an awful lot of your education. Don't you think it's worth trying?"

Ben smiled a little sheepishly. "I admit it's all my fault, that I'm foolish," he said, "but—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Will you try it—for me?" No man could have entirely resisted that entreaty.

Ben nodded. "Yes, I'll try it—for you. It's awfully good of you to want to help me."

"Nonsense! I'll teach you how to dance, that's the first things. You can learn in ten minutes. Then you can take the plunge and some day you'll thank me. See if you don't."

In due course of time Ben began his lessons. He stood before Mrs. Williams and just as she had taught him to waltz on the ice she taught him to waltz and two-step on a hardwood floor. It was not done in ten minutes, but so much was accomplished in ten lessons that Mrs. Williams said that Ben was ready for an appearance in public. That came after the football season was over, and Mrs. Williams chose a small dance in a small hall for Ben's première. It was a dance mostly for married people, who she knew would be gentler and less awe-inspiring than a lot of débutantes and second-year girls. Besides, she would be there to manage things.

Ben went to that dance just about the way he went through the last part of a hard football game: it was the hell of a job, but it had to be done. He put on his best bib and tucker, submitted himself to Austen's critical inspection, and passed the examination with credit.

"It's sure a fine rig to exercise in," Ben said. "The cast-iron binding effect round the neck is especially pleasant and appropriate."

They went to the Williamses' to dinner. The sweet-pretty-little-thing-from-next-door was there, especially for Austen and, as to the dance, by special invitation from the powers in charge. Two other married couples were at dinner, but Ben, sitting between Mrs. Williams and Austen's girl, got along well enough.

Mr. Williams could dance after a fashion, but did it only when he could n't help it. He went to the party and played bridge all evening. That left Mrs. Williams in Ben's charge, theoretically; practically it was the other way round.

He was rather overwhelmed by the gorgeousness of the scene, and a little flustered by the broad expanses of bare shoulders and chests and arms which were everywhere about him. Even the one woman who could do no wrong surprised him a little in the matter of dress. He did not quite understand.

He danced the first dance with her and it went surprisingly well. He did not know that he was fortunate in having an unusually good floor, plenty of room in which to manoeuvre, excellent music, and an extremely expert partner. It was good fun, very good fun. There was a thrill in having Mrs. Williams in his arms, in having her willing to be there; the rhythm of the dance, which he thought of as their team-work, was very pleasing.

"You're a marvel, Ben," Mrs. Williams said, when the dance was finished. "I don't know any one who dances better than you do and they've all been at it for years."

Austen's girl came next and things did not go so well, their team-play was poor in spots. There followed, one after the other, the two young matrons who had dined at the Williamses'. When those two dances were over Ben went outdoors and sat down in the dark. He was very hot, his collar was flabby and sticky, perspiration was rolling down his face; he had made a mess of things

for fair. The truth was that any man would have made a mess of things, or it would have been made for him. The two young matrons had many virtues, but they could not dance; the poetry of motion was all Greek to them; Ben, well as he could dance with Mrs. Williams, lacked the experience which would have taught him how to make the best of a bad bargain.

That sort of business was not sport, it was very uncomfortable work.

Ben sat on the steps and moaned inwardly while he cooled off. When he was cooled off and reasonably dry, he continued to sit there, loath to go back and start the trouble all over. But finally he went and stood in the doorway of the ball-room, watching the couples glide by. He saw the two young matrons and they seemed to be getting along well enough; he did not know that in such matters appearances are often deceiving.

He caught Mrs. Williams's eye and she smiled at him, and when the dance ended he went to her. He danced with her twice and then went out on the steps again. Again he returned and again he danced with Mrs. Williams and he kept that up till it was time to go home. Toward the end the crowd thinned out so that there was more room than ever, and not much changing of partners. Austen danced time after time with his girl. Ben danced with Mrs. Williams almost without interruption. Whether that lady was pleased or not, in all ways, is unimportant; a casual observer would have said that she was quite content, that for her the dance was the thing, and she had spoken truthfully when she said that Ben was a marvel—at dancing with her.

He was very strong and that pleased her. She was not by any means a small woman, yet she was a feather in his arms, and she liked being handled as though she were a feather. Even during the short hours of that

night Ben's skill improved, he became more sure of himself and before the evening was over Mrs. Williams let herself go completely and left everything in Ben's hands. The dance was the thing for her that night, even if her partner was a callow youth and she the mother of four girls.

Laugh, skeptics, to your hearts' content, if you like, but 't is a fact nevertheless that the dance was the thing for Ben, too. A beautiful woman Mrs. Williams was, hers a rare form to hold close, yet Ben thought of nothing but their team-work and the poetry of their motion in tune with sweet music. In so thinking he did not use those silly words, but that was his general idea.

When it was all over and they were at home Mrs. Williams looked at Ben sadly. "Are n't you ashamed of yourself?" she asked.

Ben was not.

"You ought to be," Mrs. Williams said. "How often did you dance, except with me?"

Ben held up three fingers. "Three times was enough. It was terrible; I made an awful mess of it."

"I don't believe you did, I know you did n't. Nobody can dance well with everybody. You've got to hunt round till you find the right partners."

It may have been noticed that, at the dance, Mrs. Williams had made no effort to help Ben find the right ones. She undoubtedly saw how things were going and decided that she could do only harm by forcing matters. She was not quite sure whether the evening had forwarded her plans for Ben or not. She knew that he had enjoyed dancing with her, but whether or not that enjoyment had been great enough to counterbalance the other features of the occasion was a question.

"I found one right one, one right partner; is n't that enough?" Ben asked.

"Of course it is n't! Keep trying and you'll find out that it is n't."

"I don't believe that I'll ever find any one who dances as you do."

"That's just because you've danced with me a lot and are used to me. You'll achieve versatility with a little practice."

"Perhaps, but I doubt it. Honestly, are n't you a most unusually good dancer?"

How could Mrs. Williams be honest about that? She knew she was an unusually good dancer. But she did not have to be honest or dishonest about it, for at that moment Austen returned from taking the very sweet little girl home, next door.

Upstairs Ben realized that he was a sorry spectacle. His collar was down about its foundations, his shirt-front had lost at least half of its pristine glory, his cuffs were sodden masses about his wrists.

"A hell of a rig for gymnastics," he muttered. He looked at Austen who was as immaculate as he had been in the beginning. "How do you do it?" he asked.

Austen did n't know, it was just one of those things that happen and can't be explained; some wilt and some don't.

"I do," Ben said.

"Did you have a good time?"

"I like dancing with Mrs. Williams."

"You ought to; she's the best dancer I ever met, dead or alive."

"How about the ball of fire next door?"

"About the same," Austen said, in no way fussed.

Shortly afterward Ben went to a ball, the coming-out party of a young lady whom he had never seen and of whom he had never heard until Mrs. Williams got a card for him. Mrs. Williams did the thing right. She gave a

dinner before the ball and invited to it four young ladies who she believed best combined sweet dispositions with good dancing. With these four as a basis Ben ought to do well. For men she chose young gentlemen of Boston who knew everybody and who promised to introduce Ben to those young women most likely to make his path easy and pleasant.

All the young people went in to Boston and arrived with the crowd. Ben's first dance, with a willowy lady who could dance and did n't talk, was not so bad. The next one had little to commend it; the third and fourth consisted of a series of unavoidable collisions; the fifth was a repetition of the third and fourth with the added horror of a young woman who was to Ben extremely unattractive. There was n't any sixth.

His collar and shirt were gone, the crush was awful, the atmosphere was hot physically and depressing mentally. The whole blessed thing was a blamed nuisance, a most uncomfortable way of spending an evening, a waste of energy, a waste of sleep, a relic of barbarism. Mr. Thorpe put on his hat and coat and went out into the street. There he hired a hurdic and in it he lighted his pipe and so rode comfortably to Cambridge and went to bed.

Thereafter, during the seven years he remained at Cambridge, he did not go to another ball. He went to small dances in Brookline with Mrs. Williams and danced with her. Sometimes, but very seldom, he danced with other ladies at her request,—so seldom that they hardly counted. At first Mrs. Williams was very cross and scolded him, but finally she laughed and said that he was utterly impossible.

She was very fond of Ben. In the beginning her motive in holding out a helping hand to him had been mostly charity; she knew that he was alone in the world and

that he had few friends, except his college-mates, near Cambridge. The idea of charity faded quickly from her mind and in its place came affection. She was a young woman still and the big brute appealed to her; she was an older woman and she had a motherly love for the curious boy! she was plain woman, and to have the boy—who hated women with a deep-seated, inborn, and sincere hatred—choose her alone to like and to admire, pleased her mightily.

She liked Ben, too, because he liked little children; he was very good to her girls and they loved him. Her husband liked him and said that he was an unusually able boy. She liked him because she knew a great deal about the male animal and knew that he was a peculiar but most interesting specimen of the race.

On that foundation was based a friendship, a peculiar friendship perhaps, that was never to waver.

Ben's first, and last, big dance came in December.

Before that he had again played tackle on the eleven and again Harvard had been beaten. In that game the Harvard team, admittedly the weaker, had held back the Blue horde and a tie game, a moral victory perhaps, was in sight, until the last few minutes of play. Then a substitute back was sent in, cold, and he muffed a twisting punt close to Harvard's goal line. There followed five desperate attacks on the Harvard line and five heroic but unavailing efforts to repel them, and Yale won.

Again Ben stood out as the super-player, but again one man could not turn the tide against a team which knew more football and, at the psychological moment, got the break that brought victory.

Austen saw the game from the side lines; he was third or fourth substitute end. He had not hoped for more than that.

Thaddius Octavius Thrall came back to Cambridge from his job as trolley conductor, bringing with him an amazing portion of his wages. A trolley conductor's life on a seashore line may not be a bed of roses, nor would it perhaps be looked upon ordinarily as a body-builder, but Thrall had flourished. He had lived at the sea end of his run, he had had hours off in the middle of the day and had bathed in salt water; he had lived in the open and he had gotten a great deal of exercise. He was a much improved man.

Also, a scholarship had been bestowed upon him, one which he had earned beyond question, and he was rich. He was to become richer and Bill Thurston was the first step in that direction.

Bill was happy as the day was long, except at examination time; then he was unhappy all day long. He did not look upon college work or anything else seriously; he was the pleasantest youth imaginable and there are many, many distractions at college for such as Bill. But he wanted to stay in college, and to do that he had to pass examinations, which was hard to do and a blamed nuisance.

That autumn he came to the hour examinations with his preparation therefor pretty nearly nil. The question was what to do about it. Of course the thing to do was to get a tutor and cram, but whom to get?

Ben, with inspiration, said: "Why not Thad Thrall? He knows your courses from A to Z and he sure can explain things when he goes at it."

Bill thought that was a good idea and Ben approached Thrall on the subject. Thrall said that he would do anything he could for a friend of Ben's. Ben said for Heaven's sake not to look at it in that light, it was a business proposition, a great many men tutored and made good money at it. Why not he?


Finally Thrall took the job on a contingent basis; he had never done any tutoring and was not at all sure that he could do it successfully. Therefore, if he got Bill through his examinations he would take pay, otherwise not. Thrall himself took examinations in his stride, as a hurdler takes hurdles, they were to him rather a pleasure than otherwise.

In Bill he tackled a good deal of a job; that young man's mind was pretty well void of the subjects under consideration. But, with probation or something worse staring him in the face, he was in a receptive mood, and he worked hard for two weeks and in the end squeezed through.

He sang Thrall's praises loudly; Thrall was a marvel. In his enthusiasm he became a publicity agent for Thrall. When, two months or so later, the more serious midyear examinations loomed black and portentous on the horizon, Bill came back for more help, bringing with him other young men who were in his predicament, and Thrall held classes in cramming. That really was the beginning of Thrall's fame as a tutor. He got the whole pack through the examination with hardly a mishap and the financial return took his breath away.

Thrall deserved the reward, for he possessed the same sort of genius that Hackett possessed, a rare ability not only to teach but to put inspiration into youths where inspiration had never been before, and Thrall had what Hackett never would have,—an impressive personality and a voice that thrilled even the least serious boy. Furthermore, Thrall had a head for business, which Hackett did not have.

So great did the demand for his services become after the midyear examinations that he could pick and choose his pupils, and he made so much money that he did n't know what to do with it, except to repay, with interest



and sincere thanks, what he had borrowed from Dr. Lee. There was a hitch about the interest, but Dr. Lee finally smiled and gave in. When college was over for the year Thrall did not return to his job as a trolley conductor. Instead, he spent the summer at a well-known and fashionable seaside resort, preparing a few sons of rich fathers to attack again in the autumn the entrance examinations which had been too much for them in the spring. This filled his morning hours, the rest of the day was largely his to do with as he liked, and as he was regarded as highly as a companion as he was as a tutor he found life extremely pleasant.

Thrall's ability extended beyond the accumulation of book-learning and the transmitting of it to others. Naturally keen of intellect and broad-minded, he was not satisfied with the narrow academic life with which so many men in his position are content. The lighter side of college life appealed to him, and once under way he quickly absorbed its manners and customs. He was naturally sociable and he not only enjoyed the society of his fellows but little by little went into society outside of the university. He was one of those men who, having the stuff in them to begin with, enter college at the very bottom of the scale and leave at the top.

At the end of his sophomore year, contemplating his condition then and comparing it with his condition two years before, he gave all the credit to Ben. He said something about it to Ben and Ben told him that he was crazy, which was approximately so. Nevertheless there was something in it, enough to count and to be appreciated, and to be remembered always.

To go back to the beginning of that year, Ben took a course in chemistry under Professor Jackson, a famous lecturer. Perhaps it was Jackson. perhaps it was the

fascination of the subject itself, perhaps it was just fate, but whatever it was, that elementary course started Ben on his career. He decided then and there to become a chemist. The trouble was that to study chemistry he must spend long hours in the laboratory in the afternoons; to do that he must give up football and rowing, and he had no such enthusiasm for chemistry as that. That situation brought up the question of what he was going to do and he spoke to Dr. Lee about it.

"You are admirably fixed to take up a profession," Dr. Lee said. "Most young men can't afford to keep on studying for so many years and there are lean years even after that. That would n't affect you." Ben's income was nearly five thousand dollars a year; he could do pretty much as he liked.

"I suppose I could take a post-graduate course in chemistry," Ben said, "but it seems like a half-hearted way to go at it, letting athletics interfere with it now."

"There's a great field in chemistry," the doctor said. "The surface is just scratched. How about medicine? That's chemistry in a way."

Ben laughed at that. "I'd make a fine physician!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" the doctor asked. "As I said before, you can study all you like, you won't have to rush into doing anything you can lay your hands on that will bring in a little money. Have you considered where you are going to live when you leave college? Are you going back to Lanville?"

"No, I don't think that I shall go back there, but I have n't decided anything yet."

"Take your time and think it over; there's no hurry. Why don't you consider coming to Alden? It's a fine place to live, lots of nice people, and a fine town for a medical man."

Dr. Lee said nothing about it, but Ben knew well enough that if he went to Alden as a "medical man" Dr. Lee would help him in every way he could.

It was not settled then, but it was settled before the year was over; and, with his mind once made up, Ben never wavered. He stuck to chemistry, taking all the courses he could squeeze into his schedule, and somehow he got through the laboratory work without giving up football or rowing. There was some doubt in his mind as to how much chemistry had to do with medicine, but that was not important, it was worth while in itself.

That year Austen stroked the four-oared crew at New London. Ben dropped out of the picture early in June, when the second crew was divided into fours. Ben and Lawrie Mills were the last to feel the axe; fourteen men went to New London, Ben and Lawrie were fifteen and sixteen. Ben was disappointed; Red Top at New London was a grand place and it would have been fine to row behind Austen in the four, but Ben knew, down in the bottom of his heart, that he had done better and had gone farther than he had ever expected to.

Another summer passed and again Austen and Ben returned to Cambridge for football practice. This time good ends were not like unto the leaves of the trees and Austen stood a Chinaman's chance of making the eleven. He didn't quite do it, but he was first substitute and played most of the last half next to Ben, which was enough. Neither Yale nor Harvard scored.

A few weeks later Ben was elected captain of the eleven. He deserved the honor if ever a man did, but there was a strong undercurrent of opposition to him. It was not among the players themselves, nor was it in the clubs, but came from the older men, former players

and coaches, who were afraid of him, afraid of what he would do if authority were placed in his hands.

They had never been able to teach him much football after the first year, he knew more than they knew themselves. He had not been a hard man to manage, he had submitted to discipline and had obeyed orders without a question, he had never criticized, he had always been pleasant, but nevertheless they were afraid of him. They were afraid that he had ideas of his own that would disturb the established order of things, and in those days the established order of things was very dear to the powers that were. They would much rather have a safe and sane man for captain, one who had been born and raised in the shadow of the university and who was therefore bound to respect its traditions.

That under-the-surface influence worked its hardest, in the dark, against Ben, and lost. He was elected almost unanimously and when he was elected he made his halting speech.

"If you make me captain," he said, "you will do more than select me to take orders from the coach to you. If you give me this job you must back me up from this minute, on and off the field, till we have played Yale next year. I will be responsible for the results, but I must have what I want. There must be no authority above me, except the Athletic Committee. You must take the coach that I select and work for him. I can name the coach now, and most of the assistant coaches. If the committee approves them and you promise me what I want, I'll take the job. Otherwise you must select somebody else. And only two things will count toward making the team, ability and guts, and guts will count more than anything else. I want men who hate like hell to get licked."

The older men knew what Ben meant. Harvard football would know a new régime and new methods. They

had been afraid of this, but it had come and there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

Ben had his way, and the old order changed. Three times had he played through long, hopeless games; twice Yale had battered the Harvard line and gone through to victory, but twice was enough, and he swore that there would be a different story this time. There followed much criticism and hard feeling; Ben went through it all with his mouth shut and his jaw firm.

CHAPTER X

MRS. WILLIAMS and Austen and every one else had long since given up struggling with Ben's social education. Arguments, entreaties, and threats accomplished nothing; it was no go, Ben would not play with girls. His was a hopeless case.

With Mrs. Williams and her small daughters and Mrs. Lee and Hope in Alden he was happy; with the rest of womankind he was worse than unhappy. He saw women, young and old, and was polite to them and behaved himself as he should, but he could n't keep it up long. After a few minutes a great desire to flee came over him, he became nervous and ill at ease, he shut up like a clam, and beat a hasty retreat at the very first opportunity.

Thaddius Octavius Thrall had no such antipathy for the fair sex; he liked 'em a lot and one result of that liking of his was a most ridiculous affair, but an affair which Ben looked upon very seriously. One night Ben and Austen and Thrall went to the theater in Boston and returned to Cambridge side by side in a trolley car. Opposite them, alone, was a woman. She was good-looking, after a fashion, and she was well dressed. She was not old,—twenty-eight or thirty, perhaps.—and she had rather remarkable eyes, which rested frankly upon what pleased her.

Ben was immune; he knew that a woman was there across the car, but that was all he knew. Austen knew that she was there; he knew that her eyes were working

skilfully; he saw the slightest suspicion of a smile on her lips when, now and then, she met his eyes for an instant and then looked away. To Austen she was no more than the usual woman willing to flirt; how far she would go he could not of course tell, nor did he care in the least.

They came to the university and Ben went to the back platform and Austen followed him. The car stopped, they dropped off, and the car went on. They looked about for Thrall, but he was not to be seen. They were sure that he had gotten up to leave the car and they were sure that he had expected to walk with them as far as his room in the Yard. Certainly he had not said good night.

"I'll bet a dollar he stayed to chat with that dame," Austen said.

"What dame?" Ben asked.

"The giddy one with the eyes, who sat opposite us. You don't mean to tell me you're as blind as that?"

"I didn't notice her particularly. What the devil is Thad thinking about?"

"What most every man thinks about occasionally, the ladies. Let's go down to the Square and see if they got off there; they'd have to, that's as far as the car goes."

Without a word Ben turned and walked to Harvard Square. There were unpleasant thoughts and an unpleasant picture in his mind; he could not remember what the woman looked like, but Austen's description and the fact that Thrall did not know her were enough to send sweeping over him the old, old horror. He was very fond of Thrall and Thrall was an innocent among innocents, or he had been a very short time before.

"I suppose it's dirty business, following him," he said to Austen. "Perhaps we're not following him, perhaps there's some mistake. I hope so, I hate that sort of stuff."

That was of course a foolish thing for a junior in

college to say. For a man to pick up a woman was not unusual or necessarily harmful. What followed might be harmful, but the odds were against its being so, certainly it was nothing to get excited about. Ben would not have gotten excited about it if it had not been Thrall or perhaps another of his friends. If it had been Austen—which it hardly could have been—Ben would have told him not to make an ass of himself, knowing perfectly well that Austen would not make an ass of himself. To most other men he would have said nothing; he would have contented himself with thinking them damn-fools.

But, somehow or other, it was different with Thrall.

They reached the Square and there, sure enough, was Thrall talking with the lady of the car. She was apparently waiting for another car to take her farther on; it came immediately and Thrall helped her aboard. Austen and Ben turned and entered the Yard. Thrall caught them at the steps of Holworthy. He was unashamed.

"Did you see her?" he asked enthusiastically.

"Austen did," Ben said. He opened the door and went into Number 3. Thrall followed.

"She looked pretty good to me," Thrall said. "I was curious about her, so I had a little chat with her. I thought she would n't mind; she looked like a pretty good sort."

"Of course you have her name and address and an invitation to call?" Ben asked.

"I have, and I think I'll go. She talks very well; she's a lady. Her name is Edna Waddell and she lives on Maple Street."

"I understand that perfect ladies make a practice of picking up strangers late at night. She did n't ask you to go home with her then and there, did she, notwithstanding the rather late hour?"

"No, she did n't," Thrall said, a little emphatically.

"I'm surprised."

Then Thrall laughed. "You old calamity-howler, you!" he cried. "You think every female in the world is nothing but danger let loose, to say nothing of being a walking den of iniquity. They ain't,—they is n't,—they are not; it's all in your imagination, you dyed-in-the-wool woman-hater! What do you know about women, anyway?" Thrall's voice had a lot of feeling in it; under its bantering tone was a confession of his deep affection for Ben.

"You know where I came from," Ben said, and every atom of mirth departed from Thrall. "I saw women there; I could tell you things that would make your flesh creep. It ended ten years ago, when I was twelve, but I can remember it all as though it were yesterday and I hope you'll never know a tenth of what I knew about women, when I was twelve."

"How about the women you've met since?" Austen asked. He knew how narrow and foolish Ben's point of view was, and he was not afraid to try to argue him out of it when he had the opportunity. That point of view of his must be changed, sooner or later. "Pretty straight lot, most of them; are n't they?"

Austen's voice had a soothing effect on Ben; he grinned, a little ashamed of himself. "Of course they are; I'm a fool, I know that well enough." Then he spoke to Thrall. "There are only two kinds of women who are worth a damn. If you want one kind go in town and pay for her, open and above board; if you want the other, watch your step; be sure you're getting it, getting women who have n't any monkey business about them, who live clean and think clean, who are straight through and through. The ones in between are the ones that make trouble."

Thrall was impressed, perhaps by Ben's earnestness,

perhaps by his wisdom. He resolved to forget forever the lady who lived on Maple Street in Cambridge.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Anyway, we'll let it go at that. I'm sorry that I—that I did what I did to-night."

Ben and Thrall were to stick to each other through thick and thin to the end of the chapter; their friendship was never to wane but was to increase year by year. They thought they knew each other pretty well then, and did; yet neither had the slightest suspicion that there was in one of them a trait which had not yet appeared but which was to become a dominating influence in his life. That trait was about to appear in a mild form and, once out in the open, never to disappear.

When Thrall left Ben and Austen he had made up his mind to forget all about—he took a note-book from his pocket when he reached his room and read the name—Edna Waddell, of 25 Maple Street.

He had had a pleasant taste of femininity the summer before. He had never known such women and girls as he had met then beside the sea. He had been a little afraid of them at first; he was a little self-conscious and not at all sure that he knew exactly how to behave with them. That frame of mind quickly disappeared; he found that he got along with them famously and that they were extremely attractive. It never entered his head that he was or ever would be in the least degree a fascinator of women, but he was, even then, exactly that in some degree. He was attractive to them physically, his face was of the type which pleases women; he was modest, he had tact and a pleasant way of saying things, he had an unquestionably keen intellect. He was, then, a bit unpolished as to conventions and the manners and customs of high society, but his very simplicity and unsophistication

added to his charm. Furthermore he had a strong desire to please.

Please he did, and his opportunities to please were increased by the usual lack of young and unattached men at summer resorts. That, being a tutor, he must be poor, made no difference; a young man had little need of money there, everything was provided by fond parents.

During a period of hardly more than two months Thaddeus Octavius Thrall, who two years before had one coat and that with tails and an unbelievable shine, had several affairs which, while not love-affairs, were good introductions to the sport. Two young ladies, very proper young ladies, were thrilled by him and acted accordingly. Another lady, thirty, experienced and fundamentally virtuous, taught him in the dark where they were safe, the gentle art of making noncommittal love. The first kiss, stolen in a moment of great courage, rather frightened Thrall. Nothing unpleasant happened, however, and his courage quickly returned. He soon learned the ecstasy which lies in mutually welcome kisses. The lady being an adept at that sort of thing, in the dark, led him on and on until they came to the line which her fundamental virtue did not permit her to cross.

It was, all in all, a most delightful and enlightening adventure to Thrall. He discovered the charm, the lure, the exhilaration which feminine passion imparts, even when it is under pretty definite control; he learned how very strong the call of feminine flesh may be, even when a lady is fundamentally virtuous.

At first when Thrall returned to Cambridge, he did not miss the society of ladies; his work and diversions within the university were sufficient for his happiness. But that did not last long. He already knew a few sedate families in Cambridge and Boston and gradually his circle of feminine acquaintances became greater, but it did not

broaden. The ladies, young and old, were serious and strait-laced, possessing little vivacity and no coquetry; they were just a bit dull. Some of them were pleasant in an intellectual way, but there crept over Thrall a strong desire for flirtation and the sort of love-making which he had discovered during the summer.

The lady in the trolley car gave Thrall the decided impression that she was not adverse to that sort of thing. He, not yet expert in the finer shades of feminine deportment, saw nothing wrong with her attire, and in fact there was little wrong with it. He did see her unquestioned good looks and a figure of much charm. Her complexion was excellent, her hair soft and luxuriant, her lips and her fleeting smile not to be despised; and her eyes had a very distinct call in them.

When all is said and done, she was an attractive woman of a sort and Thrall felt the need for the companionship of a woman of that sort. Making eyes at college boys, even if one of them is twenty-seven as Thrall was, is no very great crime.

Thrall made at least no definite promise to Ben that he would forget the fair Edna and never see her again; if he had made such a promise he would undoubtedly have kept it, however strong became the temptation and desire to do otherwise.

Now it happened that, in their brief conversation in Harvard Square, Thrall had not only obtained the lady's name and address but had slowly spelled out his own surname to her and had promised to call on her in the afternoon two days later.

Temptation became too strong for him. The lady lived fifteen minutes' walk away, in the residential part of Cambridge which lies northwest of the college. During the day of his engagement Thrall changed his mind a dozen times, but when the hour arrived he set out; on

his way he hesitated and almost turned back. He did not turn back, but went on, deciding at least to look at the house. He looked at it; it was rather large and not unattractive and it was in a good neighborhood. Of course he rang the bell.

Miss Waddell herself opened the door and ushered him into a room on the right of the hall on the ground floor. The house was apparently not a one-family affair, the hallway suggested that it contained several small apartments.

In her sitting-room Edna's smile suggested that the affair was delightful and delightfully naughty. Thrall stayed there for an hour, during which the lady served tea and crackers and offered him cigarettes; when he declined cigarettes she gave him permission to smoke a cigar or his pipe, she regretted that she had no cigars to offer him. Thrall's chair was comfortable and he smoked his pipe. Before he left he had made an engagement to walk with Miss Waddell through the country on the next Sunday morning.

He was surprised to discover that his first impression of Miss Waddell had not been correct. She was not nearly so good-looking as he had believed. He could see more of her now than he had seen in the car; then her fur coat had covered her to her chin; now she wore a flimsy waist which exposed a conventional expanse of throat and neck. In the car the cold that she had left or the heat that she had entered, had heightened her color; now she was rather pale. In the car her suspicion of a smile and her momentary glances had been a bit devilish and accordingly attractive; now when she could smile to her heart's content and look at Thrall as much as she liked, the devilry disappeared completely and the attraction partially. Even her first suggestion that they were being naughty did not last long.

But what, in Thrall's estimation, she lost in one direction, she gained in another. In the car her figure could only be guessed at, now it was easily seen and appreciated. She was a little above medium height and perfectly formed, and though she was dressed modestly enough she had clothed herself so that none of her physical charms were hidden. She was unquestionably expert at that sort of thing. Furthermore her face, losing the quality of the forward flirt, took on a prettiness that was quite as pleasing.

She served tea with a lady's deftness; her conversation was in no way unusual and her English open to no criticism. It developed that she was a college graduate and physical instructor in a girls' school. She was ashamed of their unconventional meeting and would n't have any one know about it for worlds; accordingly they discovered where they might have met conventionally and agreed to bear it in mind if explanations ever became necessary.

She asked whether Thrall's friends, those who were with him in the car, knew what had happened and Thrall said that they knew he had spoken to her, but they did not know that he was calling on her.

"What will they think when they find that out?" she asked.

"They will not think anything about it,—certainly nothing unpleasant."

"But what must they think of me?"

"I imagine they rather envied me," he said, laughing. "Perhaps some day when I'm sure they can't cut me out with you, if that day ever comes, you'll let me bring them to see you, to find out how nice you are."

"Perhaps, some day," Edna answered.

Thrall did not know that if Edna had been permitted to choose in the car which of the three men should call on

her, she would have chosen Ben without a moment's hesitation. She knew who Ben was, she had seen his picture in the papers, she had seen him play football, and she had sat close to him one evening at a lecture. She was five or six years older than he, and he stirred up no girlish and romantic passion in her breast, but she would have liked nothing better than to know him and see what she could do with him.

"I don't believe Thorpe will come," Thrall said. "He doesn't like women."

"Isn't it fortunate all men are not like that! How dull the world would be, for everybody!"

They went to walk on Sunday morning. The day was fine and they walked far, first taking a car that carried them out of the closely settled districts. Thrall discovered that Miss Waddell did not object to being touched; her arm was his to hold: when they stopped for a moment on a hill-top and he stood close, she seemed not to notice it. She knew the game.

Thrall invited her to go to the theater and they went. When, returning, they left the car at Harvard Square, she suggested that they walk the rest of the way instead of taking another car. The streets were deserted, he took her arm and clasped her hand in his; when they came to a safe place he put his arm around her waist. She would not let him kiss her then, but she was not offended; he was more successful in the vestibule of her house; she murmured, "Please don't! oh, please don't," and made no serious effort to stop him.

He went into her sitting-room with her, without being invited. She held her finger to her lips and indicated a room close by where her companion was asleep. He stayed only a moment, long enough to make another en-

gagement. At the door she snapped her finger against his sleeve and laughing held up her lips for one kiss.

She liked Thrall, she liked him much more than she had expected to; she liked him just as a great many women were going to like him later on. She, like the lady of the seashore, was fundamentally virtuous but, unlike that lady, her temptation to forego virtue was strong. Fear, her conscience, and her hopes of marriage kept her from foregoing it.

Thrall called at the appointed time, five o'clock, to discover that Miss Waddell's companion had gone off to dinner, unexpectedly.

"Stay and have dinner with me, in her place," Edna suggested. "I'll get it myself—you don't mind, do you? It is very simple; we can't afford a maid."

Thrall stayed. For an hour they remained in the living-room and during that time she refused Thrall more than one kiss and that one he had to steal from her cheek over her shoulder. Then she went to the kitchen and Thrall followed, to help. She put on a long apron and Thrall, tying it behind, slipped his arm around her and held her fast; she resisted, not enough to prevent him from kissing her three or four times, but enough to make the kisses unsatisfactory.

She told him that he must behave and he did behave, more or less, until after dinner, when Edna left the dishes to be washed "by a woman who came in every morning for two hours." They went back to the living-room and she was less unyielding. It was all every day, common stuff, a pastime as old as the world. The girl was no novice at it and Thrall knew it; he was not playing with an innocent child. But her mood soon changed again and during the rest of that evening she was dignified. She would not even kiss Thrall good night. She was not an intellectual giantess, was Edna, but she was bright and

she talked well. Thrall, with his pipe and his comfortable chair, enjoyed the evening greatly; he liked the girl herself even when she was isolated in her straight-backed chair.

Thrall liked her and she liked him; the more she saw of him the more she liked him. The next three times she saw him, after the night of the dinner, she would not let him touch her. She laughed at him, teased him, and kept him in the open. Once she had done wrong, but never again, she said. She was a wise young woman and a busy physical instructor; she knew only a handful of men in Cambridge and they were a lot of sticks, except Thrall. She had n't picked up a man for some time till that night in the car; having caught Thrall, she had no intention of losing him; she was a stranger in Cambridge and she was lonely, she needed him.

The art of captivating men had been born in her. She wanted to be married and had had her chances, but she had been poor all her life and she was n't going to marry a poor man. She lacked almost completely the personal modesty which is the most valuable possession of finer-grained women. If she did not dislike a man she was perfectly willing to have him kiss her, much as other women shake hands. She was n't a bad girl, by any manner of means. Considering the passion that was in that magnificent body of hers, she behaved pretty well. But she did have to be loved; she simply could n't get along without it and that's all there was to it. And Thrall loved her as she had never been loved before, he was more of a man than she had ever known before; he pleased her and she was n't going to lose him if she could help it. That was why she kept him waiting for two weeks before she sank into his arms again. By that time she had Thrall crazy about her.

She was almost his only recreation—and dissipation.

She did not interfere with his work; rather she made him keener at it and sharpened his wits. He needed her; she was a necessary part of his life. He was entitled to an afternoon or evening off three or four times a week and he spent them with her and was the better for it. She put spice into life, put a thrill into it, put something into it that made it more worth while than it had been before.

It went on that way for three months. Thrall did not tell Ben or Austen that he was seeing the lady of the car and it chanced that they never suspected it. Then one afternoon, when midyear examinations were over, Ben suggested that they celebrate.

"I'll give the party," he said. "Let's go in town and have dinner and go to a show,—regular spree."

Austen liked the idea and agreed promptly, but Thrall was sorry, he said that he could not go.

Of course he could go! Why on earth could n't he go? It was easy enough to see that he was embarrassed and did not wish to say why not.

A girl probably was the answer, but why on earth should Thrall be unwilling to admit that he had a date with a girl?

"Make it to-morrow night and you're on," he said.

They let it go at that.

Later Ben said to Austen: "Queer, was n't it, the way Thad acted? You don't suppose he's chasing some dame he's ashamed of, do you?"

"I don't know, I have n't seen any signs of it," Austen answered. "It could n't be the girl he picked up in the car that night, could it?"

"Hell, no!" Ben was emphatic.

Again they let it go at that, but the next night the question came up again with a bang. Thrall was in an alarming condition, his face was almost ghastly; his mind was not on dinner, the play, or his friends' words; he was

nervous, absent-minded, and ill at ease. He insisted that nothing, absolutely nothing, was wrong, and he stuck to it. But something certainly was wrong and it stayed wrong for two weeks. During those two weeks Thrall remained very much as he had been the night in town. Ben and Austen saw it, no one could help seeing it; they begged Thrall to tell them what the trouble was, but he insisted that there was no trouble.

The trouble was, in reality, quite simple, and what might have been expected. On the night when Thrall could not go to town he had, of course, gone to see Miss Waddell. The evening had begun pleasantly but had ended with a quarrel. Edna called Thrall a few cruel names, told him to go and never come back, buried her face in her hands for a moment and sobbed, and then staggered from the room. Immediately she was out of sight she became quite calm and waited, listening.

Thrall, the fool, put on his hat and coat and departed, instead of sitting down, lighting his pipe, and waiting for the girl to come back and be reasonable. She had fooled him completely and she had not intended to; it was all part of the game and she enjoyed her fury and the passion of the moment. The joy of reconciliation would be great.

Thrall lacked experience and was fooled. He hadn't harmed the girl, whatever fault there was was hers quite as much as his. At first he was frightened, then ashamed, and then both, with a great deal of regret and broken heart thrown in. He had much to learn. Once out of the house, he did n't dare go back; he thought that he was n't wanted. Then followed a most unhappy time.

Edna waited two weeks for something to happen,—Thrall's return, penitent; a penitent note; a telephone message, anything. But nothing happened; a day or two more and she would have sent for him and told him that,

while she ought not to forgive him, she would give him one more chance.

As luck would have it, it was not to work out that way.

One afternoon at the end of the two weeks Edna took a walk, as a forlorn hope. She could not reach Thrall on the telephone, she would not write to him, she might meet him if she walked through the college grounds or even around them. She was sure that if she was fortunate enough to meet him a smile would bring him back.

She did not meet Thrall, but she met Ben, some distance from the university. They came together at a street corner and she did not hesitate. She smiled and spoke to him. "It's a wonderful day, is n't it?" she said.

She was clever enough not to spoil things by making eyes or suggesting that, in walking with him, she was doing more than ordinary courtesy required; it was more than likely that Thorpe would not remember her and, accordingly, that he would suppose that he had met her before and had forgotten her. Her ruse worked. Just what good was to come of it she herself was not sure. If any good was to come of it, it must come quickly, their paths would separate in two or three blocks. For a moment she spoke of impersonal things, then she opened the important subject.

"How is Mr. Thrall?" she asked. "He's a great friend of yours, is n't he?"

She knew that those words would undoubtedly give her away, but what harm would that do? No matter what happened then, Thorpe would certainly tell Thrall that he had seen her and spoken to her and Thrall would discover that she was still friendly; she might even contrive to have Thorpe tell Thrall that she missed him.

Ben had n't recognized her; he had hardly noticed her in the car three months before, and, besides, then she had been fur-clad and saucy, now she was tailor-made and

"I think I might," she said.

"There's no time like the present. Could n't we take a walk now, if you have n't anything to do?"

"Yes. If you'll come to Maple Street I'll give you tea. Do you like tea?"

"I do, immensely."

At the next corner they turned and walked westward and went directly to Maple Street. It was the proper time for tea. Miss Waddell gave Ben the comfortable chair and offered him cigarettes and when he declined them urged him to smoke his pipe or a cigar; she was sorry that she had no cigars to offer him.

Tea-time passed decorously. She remembered that Thrall had said that Thorpe had no use for women, but he did not indicate it now. She knew that many men who cared nothing for women in crowds sometimes liked individual women very much. She rather thought Thorpe liked her, she certainly liked him; she thought that she might like him, despite his youth, more than she liked Thrall. There was something about him—his slow speech, the firm set of his jaw, his eyes, his lips that almost but never quite broke into a smile—that fascinated her. He was well worth cultivating.

He stayed with her for an hour. When he rose to go he told her that he had had a very pleasant time; she asked him to come again and then he really smiled. He held out his hand, she gave him hers, and he held it. She made a very small effort to draw it away, but he held it firmly; he put his other hand over hers.

"Look at me, let me see your eyes," he said. They were standing so that the light shone on her face. She looked up at him and he looked into her eyes till she lowered them. Then he put his hand on her back, drew her up to him, and kissed her forehead. He did it rather well, she liked it and she had been lonely; no one had loved

her for two weeks and she was willing that Ben should go on. She let him understand that.

He did not go on. He said good-by, put on his hat, and went out. On the street he wondered whether he was a contemptible cad and was pretty sure that he was. But there was an excuse for what he had done, whether it was a good one or not. He had gone with the girl to find out what sort of creature she was and he had found out. She was not what he had thought, three months before, she might be; she was a school-teacher and she lived in a respectable place. She had picked Thrall up and she had picked him up; a girl who did that sort of thing was willing to be kissed and handled promiscuously, that went without saying; she had let him kiss her without the slightest protest, the first time he saw her; she had welcomed it.

All of that was proof enough that she was a coarse-fibered woman, a woman who fundamentally was crude and uncultured, no matter what sort of superficial refinement she had achieved. But that was n't anything to worry about; if a man liked that sort, liked what she liked, well and good, let him get what pleasure he could from her. That sort, if she did n't go any farther, would not do even the unsophisticated and inexperienced Thrall much harm.

The trouble was that Ben was absolutely sure that she did n't stop there. Eyes tell many tales and he had seen in her eyes that which there could be no mistaking. She might not, now, be a bad woman, she might never become a bad woman; fear for herself, fear that others might find out, fear that she might lose her place and be unable to earn her living, all sorts of fear might keep her straight, but never in the wide world would she keep straight for virtue's own sake. She was a passionate woman and a very weak one—he could see that in her

eyes,—and the combination was dangerous for her and dangerous for her friends; it was very dangerous for Thrall.

Ben undoubtedly made a mountain out of a mole-hill. Miss Waddell had no sinister designs on Thrall or any one else, she wanted to harm no one. There are many women like her and only a few of them get into trouble or get men into trouble. But Ben, then as ever in such matters, knew no moderation. He did not like women and he hated with all his power to hate the in-between sort of woman; he was very fond of Thrall, Thrall was one of his best friends. He understood that Thrall did not understand, he knew Thrall's danger. Already something had happened that, for two weeks, had cast Thrall into the depths of despair. It could n't be unrequited love, that was utterly impossible, it must be some trouble, some mix-up with Edna Waddell. And Miss Waddell wanted him to come back to her, that had been as plain as day. Why she wanted him to come back was not clear.

The question was, what was Ben going to do about it? That was something of a problem.

He went straight to Austen, who was reading in Number 3 Holworthy.

"I've met Thad's girl," he said, "the one he picked up. I picked her up myself, or she picked me up."

Austen stared at Ben in amazement. "You pick up a girl! I would n't have believed it possible."

"Well, it happened, anyway, and I had tea with her in her apartment. She says she's a school-teacher. I guess she is. Anyway, she's what's the matter with Thad, I'm dead sure of that."

"Not—there's nothing wrong, very wrong, is there?"

Ben shook his head. "No, I don't think so."

"Then what's the trouble?"

"I don't know. I did n't ask her."

"What sort of girl is she?" Austen asked.

"She's good-looking outside, she's bright enough but—well—she's cheap, she certainly has no fine instincts. My guess is that she and some lad are going to get into trouble some day. Maybe I'm a damn-fool, I guess I am, but I hate like hell to have Thad playing round with her. What does he know about women? If anybody ought to stick to the right sort, he ought to."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do about it? What can anybody do about it? It's none of my business; and if there's anything in history, the easiest way to stir up trouble is to try to interfere between a man and his girl." Ben stood looking through the window, across the Yard to where Thrall lived. "There's a light in his room," he said. "I'm going down to see him."

"What are you going to say to him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, maybe I won't say anything, but I'm going down anyway. Want to come?"

"No, I guess not. One's better than two, in case you do say anything. I'll see you at dinner."

Ben went across the Yard to Thrall's room.

"Hello, Thad," he said. "Feeling better?"

"I feel all right," Thrall said, in the same old nervous, distraught tone.

"Cheer up, everything's all right. I saw your girl this afternoon and she's forgiven you." That last was a guess. "She wants you to go and see her." That was n't a guess, she had asked Ben to tell Thrall so.

"What's that!" Thrall's voice had excitement in it.

"Yes, that's the truth. I met her up the street and she took me home, to tea." Thrall had gotten up and was walking about the room. "Miss Edna Waddell of twenty-five Maple Street—that's right, is n't it?"

Thrall stopped his walking and looked at Ben; his face flushed.

"Yes, that's right," he said.

"I just dropped in to give you her message. You'd better go and see her." Ben rose and went toward the door and turned. "I may be wrong, Thad, I hope I am, and perhaps you don't want my advice, but I'm going to give it to you. Watch your step if you don't want to get your foot stuck in the mud."

Ben went through the door and closed it. He went back to Austen.

Thrall went to dinner and from dinner to 25 Maple Street; he arrived there a little early. Edna received him in a most matter-of-fact way. She had to, the other girl was there, but the other girl soon departed, upstairs to a friend's apartment; the two girls did that for each other as a matter of course.

When the other girl was gone and the door safely latched, Edna quickly confessed that she was willing to let bygones be bygones and they were soon playing their old game. Curiously enough Thrall tired of it before very long. The thrill was gone and he kept thinking of the words, "Watch your step if you don't want to get your foot stuck in the mud."

There was n't anything extraordinary in that, that's the way it usually works out. It was perhaps unusual that it should have come that night, when Thrall had been denied Edna's caresses for two whole weeks. But come it did, and as he walked home Thrall was a little disgusted. He got over it and two or three days later went back for more, but there was n't any question about it, his old enthusiasm was gone.

Then he met a professor's daughter, a young woman who was so good that she was almost prudish. She had been born with a mind and had been given an education,

but neither had dulled her liking for the male sex. The male sex, by and large, did not like her, but Thrall liked her immensely and she liked him. Her manner was a bit cold, she was a little imperious—both unconsciously—and the contrast with Edna pleased Thrall; variety is the spice of life.

Thus Thrall watched his step and escaped all possibility of getting his foot stuck in the mud. Ben soon discovered what had happened, though he had n't the faintest idea how it had happened. He took no credit to himself. As to Thrall, many ladies were to follow Edna and the professor's daughter in his life; women were food and drink to him.

CHAPTER XI

SPRING was again upon Cambridge and life for Ben and Austen and Thrall was serene. Austin had followed in his brother's footsteps and Ben had gone along with him; of what the university had to offer them they had received all that they desired, almost more than they desired. It had come as a matter of course and they were not elated. Honors easily achieved lose some of their splendor.

Thrall followed not far behind them; his worth, ability, and personality had won recognition. In the beginning he not only had not hoped for social success but had known nothing of the social life of the university and, accordingly, when college honors came to him they were very precious. Very precious, too, were his academic success and his ability to tutor. Curiously enough, he abandoned his plan to become again a teacher and decided upon the law as Austen had done years before. He never went in for athletics, he had neither love nor knack for it.

Ben, with his college work, his rowing, spring football practice, and many minor duties, was a busy man. He seriously considered giving up rowing, but it had him in its grip; it was a glorious sport, and as so often happens, he wanted most the thing which was hardest to obtain. He wanted to row in the university crew.

Austen, as soon as a crew was formed, went in at stroke and stayed there; there was no competition for

the place. Ben struggled on in the second crew, hoping against hope. There was nothing graceful about him, even on the football field he appeared awkward and unskilful, but he was tremendously effective and few who had not played with him or against him realized how great his strength and speed were. But in an eight-oared shell things did not work so well; he pulled with enormous power and was untiring and he had no very serious faults, but somehow or other he did not quite fit in with the other seven men. No matter how well a man may row as an individual, if he does not row in complete harmony with those before and behind him, then a "break" occurs in the boat, and rhythm, which is the foundation of speed, cannot be obtained.

Ben did not make the Varsity eight, but he rowed in the four, which was the next best thing. When it was all over Austen was elected captain for their senior year and Number 3 Holworthy was proud of itself. The old building had housed many a great man, but never before two Varsity captains in the same room at the same time.

Ben had said when he was elected captain of the eleven that he would be responsible for the results, but that he must have coaches of his own selection and men with "guts," who hated like hell to get licked. The coaches he selected were men in accord with his ideas of how Harvard should play football and there were plenty of players who hated like hell to get licked. But successful football is usually the result of a system extending over years; to introduce new ideas into old players and make them achieve victory over a worthy foe in one season is no easy task. Ben and his coaches did not try to revolutionize the Harvard system, the greatest change they attempted was to make the players understand the strategy of the game, to select men able to do what was required of them, and then to teach them to do the right thing at

the right time. Harvard had lost many a game, simply because her teams had not enough football sense to take advantage of the opportunities which arose. Yale had a way of doing that; Yale knew football. The Blue was no more courageous, its players were no more skilful, but long experience had taught her coaches how to make her teams do the right thing at the right time.

Ben was terribly serious about it, as well he might be, it was the biggest job he had ever tackled. The publicity given to the game, the hopes and enthusiasm of the undergraduates, and the tremendous interest of the alumni and the general public made it appear a job of enormous importance, made success seem more vital than it really was.

The scores of the preliminary games were low, the team showed no great promise, it seemed as though it could not get under way. There was much criticism, there was a feeling of depressing general in the university. But Ben had faith; the team would win, it must win, anything else was impossible. His determination, his concentration on his task, became so great that he became almost oblivious of everything else. Except when he was talking football he seldom spoke, he stalked through the Yard seeing no one and hearing nothing, his jaws shut tight and his lips pressed together, his eyes half closed. The old belief that he was a cold, cruel, hard-hearted man became a certainty to all but the few who understood.

Pennsylvania was defeated and critics said that it was because of Pennsylvania's weakness and not Harvard's strength.

Finally the Yale team came and with it the mob of merrymakers, riotous with color, come to see one lot of boys achieve ecstasy and another slink away in anguish. To thousands of young girls it was a gay social

event, with a father or a brother or a beau determining their enthusiasm for one side or the other; older women considered it an outing, with the importance of victory greatly exaggerated; men, young and old, looked upon it as a gladiatorial combat, with honor and prestige and a lot of other things at stake. Yale hoped for a big score, Harvard for a victory by any score. Disinterested ones looked for a close game with Yale winning.

Men who got down to details looked for a battle within a battle, Thorpe against Hotchkiss, both giants and past masters. Men close to the Harvard squad watched Thorpe and shook their heads. The boy was grim and silent and his eyes were the eyes of a wild beast waiting for the struggle that means life and death. Those men knew that there was to be far more in the game that day than sport.

Harvard kicked off and the Blue set about its work methodically as though demanding victory as its right. They went forward and the Crimson went back, but as the minutes passed they went back more and more slowly. Then, almost imperceptibly at first but surely, the tide turned and the Crimson had the upper hand. On and on they plowed, play after play went at Hotchkiss the giant, and Hotchkiss gave way. An end run, a punt, and a punt returned, a plunge at center, and then bang, bang, bang at Hotchkiss, who played against Thorpe.

Walcott was the Blue quarter-back and his fame was great, he was skilful and fleet and a master of generalship. On defense he played back and caught punts, punts under which Ben went down the field with his ends like the wind, as though he knew no fatigue. When the half was three quarters over the wiry little quarter-back caught a punt and was off like a greyhound to the left. Austen Lee turned him in, straight into Ben's path. The boy went down and did not move, the world

went dark for him. He thought he heard voices, but he was not sure, they were very far away; he did not know what it was all about, he could realize nothing except that he was very weary and could not move.

They carried him from the field; the Yale doctor said that he was unconscious, and the game went on. While it was going on they took the little quarter-back to the infirmary. The game went on and before the half was over Harvard scored a touch-down.

The second half was not ten minutes old before Hotchkiss lay on the ground, through. They lifted him to his feet and dragged him from the field. Ben played on. The man who took Hotchkiss's place, fresh though he was, offered little resistance. The Crimson played on, crushed on, and the Blue, with nothing left but courage, let them pass almost as they willed.

The end came, and with it victory and defeat. The Yale team, grouped together, cheered their opponents and walked away. Ben stood and watched them; he saw their faces as he had not seen them before. The multitude above him cheered and yelled, he heard his name called; his college-mates, rushing on the field, made sport of the fallen foe.

There was no smile on Ben's lips, he threw off those who rushed upon him and forced his way from the field. There was no joy in his eyes, no happiness in his heart, he had had a hard task to perform, it was over, it was done, and well done, that was all. Outside the stands he saw the red-haired end who had played against Austen; he was walking with an older man, his father, and he was sobbing as though his heart would break.

Suppose *he* had been beaten! What awful hell it would have been, what awful hell those boys over there were suffering, where the Blue was. There was hell enough on earth without making it, there was no heaven

to compensate for it. Victory was not worth the defeat.

Ben Thorpe was a queer boy. But he had seen the drab side of life and perhaps that had something to do with it.

He went to the locker room and dressed; there was a crowd there but he paid no attention to it. He heard some one say that Walcott, the Yale quarter-back, was in the infirmary, delirious. He found Austen and took his arm and they went out together. It was nearly five o'clock and almost dark.

"I'm going over to see—see about Walcott," Ben said, and they walked on to the infirmary. They could not see Walcott, they were told that it would do no good to see him. There was nothing seriously wrong; he'd be all right in a day or two.

They went on to Number 3 Holworthy and stayed there until dinner-time. They hardly spoke. Austen understood something of Ben's condition, enough to know that it was no time to let loose the joy that was in him. They went to dinner and broke training, and all through the riotous meal Ben sat grim and silent.

Some one had bought out a vaudeville house and sold it to the undergraduates, the grand celebration with speeches would be held there; there were boxes for the team, there was a special trolley car to take the team to town. Ben went into town, but when the car was only a few blocks from Harvard Bridge he got up and dropped into the darkness and disappeared. He took another car to Brookline and went to the Williamses, and there with a small Williams girl in his lap he spent the evening, until it was her bedtime. It was of course a very special occasion and she was allowed to sit up late. When she was gone Ben played chess with Mr. Williams.

They asked him to spend the night and he stayed.

The next morning Austen telephoned to know if Ben was there. When Mrs. Williams told him that Ben had

been there since after dinner the night before Austen asked her if that did n't beat anything she'd ever heard of in her life.

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Williams said. "It was awfully peaceful here last night, Ben knew it would be. You'd better come over to lunch. Ben says to bring him a collar and shirt."

Austen Lee got everything he wanted in Harvard and a lot of things that were more nuisance than anything else. Of all his honors that of playing next to Ben on the football team gave him the greatest pleasure. He was generally looked upon as a great end; he knew that most of his skill was due to Ben's teaching and most of his fame to the fact that Ben, playing tackle, did half of his work and made the other half easy.

He acknowledged all of that to Ben and expressed his everlasting gratitude, in the light vein that such boys assume to express their deep feelings. He did his level best to return the favor; he spent hours trying to make the huge Thorpe into an oarsman qualified to row at five in the Varsity crew, but all the king's horses and all the king's men could n't quite do that. There was a great question about it up to the last minute; Ben's strength and stamina were unusual, his skill considerable; the question was whether his weight and strength, never quite in tune with the rest of the crew, was a greater asset than the smoother, more rhythmic but less powerful rowing of another man. The other man won out finally and the only proof that the choice was right was that the crew won, which was proof enough.

Ben again rowed at three in the four-oared crew and was philosophical. Even if, four years before, he had known that that was to be his final place, he would have

chosen to row instead of to play baseball. The game was the thing.

He was glad when it was all over, when he had rowed his last race and played his last game of football. He was twenty-three and he had played enough. The captaincy of the eleven had carried with it something more than play, but after that there had been little but play. Undoubtedly a great many boys, reaching manhood in college, experience the sensation of having played too long and accordingly have the edge taken off their enjoyment. Ben was past all danger of trouble with his studies, it was almost too easy to obtain a high stand in them, they furnished hardly enough work even when he devoted much time to other pursuits.

His name was written large and in enduring characters across the history of undergraduate Harvard, but even so he had played and played and played. Ben looked at life very seriously. He wanted to work.

Before he graduated there occurred a sordid and unpleasant incident.

Ben was walking to the boat-house one spring afternoon with Frederick Trevor. "Heard about Bill Thurston?" Trevor asked casually. "He's in a fine pickle."

"What's the trouble?"

"There's a woman after him. She used to be in Barr's stationery store. Her name is Lizzie Meadows. Everybody knew her. Pretty as the devil."

"I don't remember her," Ben said.

"Well, anyway, she's in trouble and is blaming Bill. If Bill's dad finds out about it, there'll be hell to pay for Bill and there's hell enough for him as it is."

"What is it, blackmail?"

"In a way, I suppose, but she may have some right back of her."

"I see."

William Thurston was no worse than a lot of boys in college, and a great deal better than many of them. He was a good-natured, lovable fellow who furnished much entertainment for his friends, and Ben was his friend. That night Ben went to Thurston's room and heard the whole story.

Bill had n't known there was a chance for anything to go wrong. He had supposed it was a regular thing with her; anyway she didn't seem worried about anything and he'd known her for a couple of years. There had never been the slightest suggestion of love between them, she certainly had not expected anything of the sort. Bill had given her presents of money and other things and had supposed that she had had presents from other men.

Ben listened to the story. Somehow or other the tale seemed perfectly natural: that was what women were for,—to make trouble, to get men into scrapes, to raise hell generally. Lizzie had written letters to Thurston and Ben read them.

"Naturally you want to get out of this mix-up somehow or other without publicity," Ben said.

"Do I? If the Governor ever finds out about it I don't know what he'll do, but it will be plenty, and I guess the college would n't think it was a joke."

"How about the girl? She's a human being—in a rotten predicament."

"I'll do anything I can for her, within reason, except admit I'm——"

"All right. Will you let me see what I can do for you?"

"Will I? Get me out of this and I'll—I'll—I'll do anything on earth for you."

Ben made Thurston tell him the name of every man who, so far as Thurston knew, knew Lizzie.

Within a week Ben had talked to a dozen men and knew all he needed to know. Information had been hard to get at first, but he had made them see the light and promised that no harm should come to them.

Then he went to a lawyer and talked with him and had an affidavit drawn. Then, accompanied by an oldish gentleman, who looked like a clerk, he called on Lizzie in her room in a cheap boarding-house, leaving the oldish gentleman outside.

Lizzie Meadows had been a pleasant young lady, very good to look at and very thoroughly educated along certain narrow lines; now she was haggard, forlorn and desperate. She asked Ben what she could do for him.

"Do you know what blackmail is?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean." She tried weakly to appear innocent.

"I'm sure you do. You may not know the penalty."

"Really, I don't care to listen to such talk." She tried to keep up her bluff.

"I'm sorry, but you will have to, or take the consequences."

Lizzie had an idea that Ben meant what he said; certainly if a man's face was ever designed to put fear into a woman's heart, Ben's was.

"Say, what's all this about?" she demanded.

"You know perfectly well what it's about. You're in trouble and you're trying to put the blame on Mr. Thurston, because he has more money than some of your other friends. It won't work, young woman, you've made a mistake. The next time you try this game, don't write letters."

"Aw, say, yer tryin' to bluff me, ain't yer?" Her choice of words showed the veil had been lifted.

"Not for a minute. I've shown your letters to an excellent lawyer and he tells me they are quite enough

to put you in jail. That is a mistake your kind often makes, he says. Furthermore, I can prove that you cannot possibly know who is the father of your child, and I can certainly prove that you are nearly, if not quite, a common prostitute. Is that clear?

Lizzie Meadows had good reason for suspecting that the game was up, but there was still a chance.

"I'll fix you," she cried, "you damn sneak!" She rushed to the door, locked it, and took the key. "I'll fix you. Promise to leave me be or I'll pull my hair down, tear my clothes, and scream—I can do it right—and they'll find you here. I guess that will fix you. How about it?"

"Go on, go on, scream and tear your clothes to your heart's content."

Lizzie tried to scream, but the attempt died a-borning.

"Why don't you do it?"

"Hell! what's the use? What do you want?"

"Through screaming?"

"What you want? Tell me, will you?"

"I want you to sign this." He handed her a type-written sheet. She read it.

"Do I get my letters back if I sign this?" Blackmail and jail were on her mind.

"If you want them."

"When?"

"To-morrow. Naturally, I have n't them with me."

"How do I know I'll get them?"

"You don't, you'll have to take a chance. I'd take it, if I were you."

"What else do I get?"

"You don't get a promise of a thing; you'll have to take a chance on that, too."

Those words held out a little hope to Lizzie. "All right, I'll sign it," she said.

"Just a moment." Ben called to the oldish gentleman. Lizzie signed the affidavit before the notary, who then departed.

"Now, Lizzie, tell me what you are up against," Ben said.

"What's that to you?"

"It's nothing to me, but I should think it would be to you."

"I'm up against it for fair." All the fight was gone out of her and she was begging for help.

"Have n't you a family?"

"You don't expect me to go home like this, do you?"

"I suppose not. Have you any money?"

"Sure, lots; about thirty cents and I owe a week's board."

"When is the baby expected?"

"September."

"Will you do as I tell you?"

"Tell me first."

"Go to a doctor who is a friend of mine. He will send you to a good place where you'll be well taken care of. They will keep your baby a year after it is born. If by that time you can take care of it properly you can have it. If you can't, it will go to a foundling asylum. You'll need about five hundred dollars to pay expenses and have a little left to start again. I'll see that you get it."

"Say, who are you? Oh, I don't have to ask, I know who you are right enough, but what's the game? Who's putting up the cash?"

"Never mind, it's nobody you know. How do you like the scheme?"

"Like it! How in God's name could I help likin' it? Are you tellin' me straight?"

"Of course. Here's the address. How much board do you owe?"

She told him and he gave her the money.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen. I know I look twenty-five, but I'm nineteen; that's straight."

"Good Lord!"

"Say, can I come and see you when I'm out again?"

"No, I don't want to see you."

As he went through the door he saw the girl fall on the sofa and heard her sob. "She has made a good beginning," Ben thought. "She'll make a corker, with a little more experience, and she has lots of time."

He went to Bill Thurston and told him that his troubles were over. Bill tried to express his thanks, but Ben did not want them.

"Forget it, Bill," he said. "But if you must do that sort of thing, for God's sake do it right."

From Harvard College Ben went to the Harvard Medical School, and in passing from one to the other he passed from youth to manhood. With him there was no dragging out of care-free days, no clinging to the freedom of the undergraduate, but a complete severing of the old associations and the beginning of serious things. Even as Thaddius Octavius Thrall had once had a vision, so had Ben a vision which never failed.

Ever since he had come under the observation of intelligent men, Ben Thorpe's powers of application and concentration had been known and often marveled at. During his four years in the medical school those powers seemed to increase and even if his college fame had not attracted to him the doctors' attention he would soon have been a marked man among his fellows. He quickly stood out from them as a giant tree from among a grove

of saplings, and as remarkable as his mental attributes was the skill of his hands.

They were huge hands, fitted to arms like a blacksmith's, strong as steel, and yet his touch was as delicate as a young girl's, and there was an inspiration in it. There seemed to be in him a divine gift,—the knack, the art, the genius of surgery.

He led a life of routine, work, food, sleep, and exercise, methodically planned and religiously followed, with his enthusiasm never flagging and his vision ever becoming brighter. At the end of his four years his teachers sent him on his way, knowing that he would go far and sure, but even they hardly dared to guess at his final goal. There followed two years in the Massachusetts General Hospital and a year in Europe.

Austen studied law and was admitted to the bar and married the little girl who lived next door to the Williamses. Her name was Elinor. Austen set up house-keeping and started the practice of law in Alden almost on the same day.

CHAPTER XII

BEN THORPE'S career in medicine and surgery can be touched upon only lightly, for this is, of course, the history of his unprofessional life, and only the first part of that life. It is a common practice for a man to speak in glowing terms of the skill and knowledge of any physician who is his friend or to whom he is otherwise favorably inclined; he uses superlatives, and exaggeration creeps into his statements to a greater or less degree.

How great, therefore, must the temptation be for an historian to exaggerate in writing of his hero when he is of the medical profession and when, beyond a shadow of a doubt, his hero not only shows great promise in his work, but sets about it with a tremendous will to succeed and soon draws to himself the attention and admiration of his associates, old and young.


Having all his life loved little children, Ben naturally was drawn to them in his work. Old and young came under his hands, but he liked most of all his work with the very young. Perhaps the fact that little children had faith in him roused him to still greater love and enthusiasm for them. They knew that he was their friend, they trusted him, gave themselves willingly into his charge. None of them knew why they did it, they were too young to analyze or even to think about it; their feeling toward him was as instinctive as a child's love

for his mother. Hardly a little boy or girl ever failed him.

Before Ben had been in Alden very long Dr. Lee helped him to obtain a place on the staff of the Children's Hospital and much of his work was done there. It brought him in contact with many very poor families near the hospital and he soon found himself with more work than he could do. Most of it was charity work or close to it, but he had no great need of money; he made enough, with his private income, to take care of all his needs.

The time soon came when he needed some one in his office to act as secretary and as nurse. He found that combination in a woman named Florence Mills who, with her mother, moved into his third floor and set up housekeeping there. Ben himself had a colored man-servant who performed all the work of his household. All in all he did very well for Ben, who was not over particular as to such things as the neatness of his house. Ben was a little careless, too, as to his clothes; an old suit was a comfortable thing and within reason the older the more comfortable. The same great fundamental truth applied to shoes and hats; furthermore, he didn't have to worry about them in any weather when they were old.

His life in Alden was as well ordered as life in the medical school had been, an everlasting routine of work and exercise. Ben knew well the danger of letting his huge frame become slothful, of not giving his heart enough to do and of becoming fat, and he appreciated the benefits to his mind of recreation. His tendency was to dine in his own house, alone if need be but preferably with a man often asked at the last moment. Sometimes he stayed at the golf club or the Racquet Club when the prospect was cheering, but he seldom dined in private



houses. The futility of dinner parties was only too apparent and it was seldom indeed that he returned from a formal dinner without feeling that he had wasted time and been bored into the bargain. It had to be done occasionally and he got through it with the best grace he could. Nothing was farther from his desire than to be boorish or ungracious.

It was virtually only at these few dinners, coming at long intervals, that he talked with women in Alden society and these women made very little impression on him. It was not long before Ben, entirely ignorant of the flurry he was causing, became talked about as a man whom no woman could attract; he was impervious to their wiles, ignorant of their charms, oblivious of their fascination, a man who had no need of and desired nothing from women.

Whether or not the blind side of Ben Thorpe was of his own making is of no importance. The years had lessened this too uncharitable view of women, but he had never lost his aversion to them. With certain noted exceptions he had never met a woman with whom he enjoyed talking, he had never talked with a woman without wanting the talk to end so that he might leave her. When they were forced on him a numbness stole over his brain and was not dispelled until he was in the open air and free. A woman was an irritating thing, like something in one's eye, or a cut on a finger-tip.

One exception was Florence Mills. No woman ever lived in whom there was less sex. She played a very small part in Ben's life and would not be mentioned at all were it not that she, unquestionably a woman, lived in his house and worked for him. She was a nurse, a clerk, a woman of keen perception, steady nerves, and no sentiment. Ben chose her for her efficiency; he discovered the efficiency first and the woman afterward.

She was strong, spoke little, was remarkably adept at understanding both his orders and unspoken wishes. She had initiative but not too much. There was nothing feminine about her, but, to do her justice, neither was there anything masculine. She was probably the only woman on earth who would have filled the position satisfactorily to her employer.

In the ten years since Ben had first gone to Alden he had become almost a member of the Lee family. That condition had come about slowly and he had resisted the tendency at first, but the strength of their affection was too much for Ben; he succumbed to it and went to them for nearly all of his vacations. He knew that he placed no burden on their large household, he knew that they liked to have him there, and he found with them what he found with the Williamses in Brookline,—the soothing, satisfying atmosphere of the home.

On the whole, Ben and Mary had gotten on rather well during those ten years—or the first half of them—each annoying the other as little as possible. Then Mary married and went to live in an apartment on Willow Street and Ben after that saw little of her.

Elizabeth, the quiet, serious girl, was twenty-five when Ben came to live in Alden. She had gone through college, and was now earning her own living for the satisfaction she got in doing it.

Hope was of course grown up, though she was only twenty. The growing-up process had not been gradual so far as Ben was concerned, to him she had grown up overnight. When she was ten Ben had picked her up in his arms, nighty and all, and carried her to her room and put her into her bed. The same thing, or something similar to it, happened three or four times more during the next year or two. They were in nowise annoyed when others tried to tease them about their mutual in-

fatuation. Hope spent many an hour in Ben's lap, sometimes chatting, sometimes asleep or near to it while he read. It was very comfortable for her and did not bother him a bit, they fitted together beautifully.

Ben never went to a dance in Alden. He came very near it once, after Austen had told him a few things for the good of his soul. Ben was n't worried about his soul, but he did want to please Austen. He could n't see what pleasure his going to a dance would give Austen, the spectacle he made of himself was decidedly depressing, but Austen insisted, and he'd do anything for a friend in need. So he virtually promised to go to one particular dance. When the time came, Providence intervened.

It was winter and there was skating; also, there was a moon. Furthermore, it was a very special occasion both for Hope and a near-by and private skating-pond; the skating-pond was to have music and Japanese lanterns and Hope was to go with Alice Meigs. It being in vacation with no school the next day, and it being a very special occasion, Hope was to stay as late as ten o'clock if she wanted to. Then Alice was taken ill. Of course there was nothing in the world for a gentleman to do but to rush to the rescue of the damsel in distress and of course Ben did it.

"You and I'll go skating," Ben said.

"But you're going to the dance."

"Was, but I'm not. I like skating better."

Hope looked at him, wide-eyed. "Honest, cross your heart, with me?"

"Honest, cross my heart, hope to die, I do—even with you, little sister."

It was the first time he had ever called her that. It was but a natural, playful appellation, and she understood it so. But she remembered it.

"What will the others say?" she exclaimed.

"Suppose we let the others shout their heads off, tear their hair and gnash their teeth—in fact, let 'em rave, while you and I brave the storm and go skating. Only you 've got to promise not to keep me up too late."

"I think you 're perfectly wonderful."

They braved the storm, which took the form of amused smiles, and went skating.

Hope had reached almost if not quite her full height; she was a tall, willowy young woman with the agility of childhood still upon her, and she skated well. Ben had taught her something of fancy skating and how to dance on the ice, and with the music to aid them,—a most unusual occurrence for Alden in those days,—they made a fine evening of it. Hope thought she had never been quite so happy before, especially when she heard people say, "That 's Thorpe, the Harvard tackle," and she knew that he was all hers, for that evening. There were many girls there, much older girls, who would have loved to have him all to themselves.

But the end came, as ends will, and they started home arm in arm. After a few minutes talk of the wonderful evening she had had Hope was silent, for almost a block. She was thinking of "little sister." It took all her courage for her to say:

"You have n't any brothers or sisters, have you, Ben?"

"No, I have n't, I never have had. I 'm all alone in the world."

"I knew that your father was dead. Is your mother dead, too?"

That was a hard question to answer. "Has n't Austen or your mother ever told you who I was when I was a little shaver and how I came to know people like you?"

"No, I don't think that Austen ever told me anything

except that you lived with your father and mother in a place on the Hudson."

"That was n't the beginning. I never knew who my father was and my mother went—went away. Until I was twelve years old I lived in New York, sometimes all alone. I slept in the hay in a stable, sometimes on blankets a man gave me. I sold papers, and I was n't a very good boy. Then one day in the summer I went up the Hudson with a lot of other boys and men and Mr. Thorpe saw me and spoke to me and asked me all about myself and I told him all I knew and he took me home with him to Lanville just as I was. He was very good to me. He first thing he did was to give me a bath,—Lord knows I needed it!—and he got me some good clothes and gave me a lot to eat and took me to a teacher he knew. A month or so later he adopted me and I was really his son and he was really my father; he was always very good to me and he was really my father all the more because I had never known my other father. He sent me to college and I met Austen. That's how I came to know your father and mother and you. My father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe, never had any children and so I never had any brothers or sisters."

"I think you'd be a very nice brother," Hope said.

"And I'm sure that you're a very nice sister," Ben answered.

"Don't you think that I could pretty nearly be your sister, your little sister, just between you and me, without any one else knowing?"

"Are n't you pretty nearly that now?"

"I think I am; anyway, I'd like to me. It would be lots of fun, making believe that it's so."

"Then suppose we call that settled, and suppose—is it too cold for ice-cream?"

It was never too cold for ice-cream and Ben knew it.

The lights of a well-known drug store were not far off and they took their way thither.

They did not put too much sentiment into playing brother and sister, though perhaps there was much sentiment underlying it. It was, as Hope had suggested, just between Ben and her; nobody else was let into the secret. They had other secrets and many confidences and communicated together with smiles and with their eyes most skilfully.

Hope was still a child then.

She was a large child, but somehow she curled up into a very small space when she was in Ben's lap. Strong and active as she was, she was very slender and seemed to be made of something like rubber. That was when she was twelve. She was much the same the next summer, but between that summer and the next Christmas a most remarkable thing happened.

Ben had been in Alden only a day or two of that Christmas vacation when he discovered it. There was an errand to do and Ben and Hope went to do it and, instead of going straight home, they took a walk. They came to a city park and walked through it; it was after six then and dark; the park was deserted. Hope saw the new moon appear from behind a church as they walked. She stopped and turned, facing it, and reached for Ben's hand, as she had done hundreds of times before. Unconsciously she half drew him toward her, half backed against him.

"Is n't it wonderful?" she exclaimed.

It was very beautiful,—the moon and the church spire and the tracery of the bare trees. From time immemorial such scenes have made old hearts and young beat fast; many a love-affair has been consummated, unexpectedly and a little before its time, by such a moon. Ben's arm was about Hope, her hand in his.

"What a beautiful baby moon!" she cried, innocent as a babe herself. She looked up at Ben and Ben leaned down and kissed her waiting lips. When it was done he was ashamed, because he liked the kiss so much. She looked at him with an expression of wonder in her eyes, not because he had kissed her,—she was used to that,—nor because the kiss thrilled her or stirred up any new or serious emotions, but because that kiss was so very different from any she had ever known before. She did not understand.

They both laughed and went on, arm in arm.

But that was the end of many things; they said nothing about it, but they both understood. It was a simple matter, not to be looked upon seriously either by them or by the world.

Ben did not kiss her any more, nor did she expect to be kissed; she had crossed the line. She was only thirteen, she might have let Ben kiss her a long time after that and no harm at all have been done; but somehow it did n't happen that way.

And, too, Hope had suddenly become a big girl, much too big to sit in Ben's lap. She was n't thin and straight and rubbery any more, she was really a grown-up young woman.

So when Hope was thirteen she and Ben set up a new order of conduct and they had not changed it at all, really, when Ben came to Alden to live. She was very young, still a child of twenty, a laughing, irresponsible youngster with a lot of deviltry in her, a fine-looking, strong, clean, healthy girl, with a great deal of sense and many friends.

The friends were to be expected, of course, and Ben, with all his failings and weaknesses as a beau, was rather left out of her life. He and she were the best friends in the world, but youth and old age are far apart,

and Ben was very, very old and very serious. Their old game of playing brother and sister took on a new aspect and became much more like the real thing than it had been at first.

Ben saw little of Hope. She was twenty then and a perfect gadabout. She had half a dozen really serious beaux and every one who knew her and thought much about it said that she was the sort of girl who marries early in life, that she would surely be engaged within a year, that she was simply making up her mind which man she'd take.

Ben understood and hoped that she'd get the very best of the lot. Heaven knew she deserved better than the best.

Never was a man more married than Austen, never more completely in the clutches of a woman than he. Elinor, the pretty little blonde who once upon a time had lived next door to the Williamses' house in Brookline, had presented him with a son, who was four years old when Ben came to Alden to live, a daughter who was two and another son, now two months old. Austen seemed pleased. As Elinor annoyed Ben no more than she had annoyed him in Brookline, his friendship for Austen and their intimacy lessened not at all. It was, rather, promoted by Austen's son, who was no slouch of a kid and knew a good father and uncle when he saw them, even if "uncle" was no more than a courtesy title.

Ben had Sunday supper with Austen every week; beginning by chance, the practice quickly became routine and only the most urgent matters could disturb it. A most pleasant custom it is, that meeting of old friends on the evening of the week which is almost certain to be quiet and most informal.

On those evenings Ben was pretty sure to arrive well

before the evening meal was served and in time to discuss with Master Lee the momentous occurrences of the preceding week and such other matters as came within the range of their interests. Miss Mary Lee soon grew up enough to take an intelligent and enthusiastic part in these weekly meetings.

Once upon a time Ben had made a mark upon the heart of Jean Vance; he had had no desire to do so, he did not know that he had done so. There was no evidence of the fact that a man might be expected to detect.

There is no accounting for what hearts may do, least of all what women's hearts may do. When Jean first met Ben she had her dreams and her thrills. They were not pure and pretty things, those dreams of hers, for a girl of nineteen, nor were her thrills altogether a credit to her. She got over them both and a little of regret and a little of anger settled in her heart.

Ben would have nothing to do with her; no trick in all her bag of many tricks could touch him. Not only that, but she was sure that his influence had destroyed Austen's regard for her. She hated him, for all sorts of reasons, and would have given a very great deal if he had loved her. Even she, who knew so much of love, did not know what she would have done with his love if she had had it, but she wanted it, and there was always, deep down in her heart, the feeling that it would be worth keeping.

She had pride enough and she made no advances to him. There was never any open break between them, they spoke conventionally when chance brought them together. Ben saw her eyes and hated her. She wanted Ben, or perhaps she wanted him to want her.

Jean had her love-affairs, one after the other. She had fulfilled her early promise and surpassed it; she had

achieved beauty and a complexion to go along with it, which she had not had in her youth. She had preserved her figure with great skill and it was far more becoming to a woman over thirty than to a girl of nineteen.


She had never cared for popularity in the open places. To be sought after by flocks of men at dances, to be invited to everything, to receive a multitude of attentions from those about her meant little to her. She wanted not a little from each of many men but much from one man,—that is from one man more or less,—at a time. They might overlap a little but not too much.

She got what she wanted; she got her love in all sorts of forms and she enjoyed the variety. Some made humble and respectful love, some violent, passionate love, and others all the sorts of love in between, and she liked them all, from the love that was lisped from the edge of a straight chair to the love that came hot from the lips of the man who held her in his arms. She even tried make-believe love with men who were past masters in the art of philandering.

She told all her lovers that nothing would make her so happy as to love them if she could, but that somehow or other she could n't and that was all there was to it. Part of that was true; she could n't love them, she could not have loved them even if she had wanted to. She did n't want to because she found, as she grew older and the men playing opposite her grew older, that experience added to her enjoyment of the sport.

Fortunately she did not break any hearts and if she cracked any they healed quickly. She was not the sort of woman to appeal to a man's finer and deeper instincts; her charm was physical, she was quite able to put all her soul into her eyes and all her intellect into her light chat, and have none of either left over. That appeal of hers was not lasting, once free of it the victim had no regrets.

Perhaps the reason, or part of the reason, why Jean Vance never loved any of those suitors who danced up to her and away again in profusion, was that behind them and all around them, enveloping them and dimming their luster, was the ghost of the love that Ben had put into her heart when she was nineteen. Deep or not, his mark was on that organ; cold and hard as that organ apparently was, it had been wounded and the wound had never quite healed. Naturally, the fact that she had so many suitors for whom she cared nothing and that she not only could not have the one she really wanted but was actually disliked and methodically evaded by him, did not help the wound any.



CHAPTER XIII

FOR all Ben's dislike of women, his intolerance and his narrow-mindedness, he admitted in his calm, sane moments that they had their uses. Once in a great while he even went so far as to confess to himself that it must be he who was queer, and not all the women in the world.

He had his dreams, like other men. When he had been in Alden three years a chance meeting late one December afternoon in a large, comfortable house set those dreams agoing harder than ever.

It was almost dark and no lamps had been lighted. Ben walked downstairs from the sick-room where he had been for an hour and where there would be nothing for him to do for another hour. He saw a large, low arm-chair in the dim light, with a lamp beside it. He turned on the light, filled his pipe, picked up a magazine, and settled back to read. He had hardly found the reading-matter among the advertisements when he heard a sound and looked up. A boy stood in the doorway, blinking in the light. He was in a blue wrapper and red slippers, with a little bare skin between. His cheeks were red, his hair light, and his smile broad.

"Hello, son." Ben dropped the magazine to his knees.

"Hello. What's your name?"

"Thorpe. What's yours?"

"Bill. I've got on my wrapper and new slippers."

"Pretty fine, are n't they?"

"New—just got 'em."

"How old are you?"

"Two-three-six-eight-eleven-nine." Bill was three and a half. "That's all I got on, jus' bare skin underneath. See!" He let his wrapper fall apart. He had spoken truly.

"Skin the rabbit!" Bill cried and, doing so, he stood as he was born, dazzling white on the rug against the background of darkness. Then for the sheer joy of the thing he threw himself on the soft rug and twisted and turned like a snake. He was n't showing off, he was simply having the time of his life; he growled, laughed, shouted; he turned somersaults, took a pillow from the couch and rolled over and over with it.

Ben's trained eye drank in the splendor of the child, and gloried with him in the joy of living. Finally, when the boy, exhausted for a second, lay still, he said:

"Come here, Bill."

Bill flashed to his feet and sprang into Ben's lap. "Dip death!" he cried.

"What?"

"What Daddy does. I'll show you." He took Ben's hands and scrambled to Ben's knees, on which he stood upright.

"Hold feet," he said, and before Ben could stop him he threw himself backward into space. Ben could only half break his fall, his head crashed on the floor with an echoing thump. Quickly Ben gathered him up, expecting yowls, but there was not a sound, only much rubbing of the spot and a rather annoyed expression on the child's face. In a moment a cure was effected.

"Do it again!" cried Bill. "Only you got to ketch me."

Ben understood, he was to catch the boy between his legs, held straight out before him, as the boy fell back-

ward. It was quite simple, it worked beautifully over and over again, with screams of joy, until Bill was captured by a nurse and led away, submitting to the inevitable but rejoicing at life in general.

It is not often that the miracle which produced Bill takes place. His was a temporary perfection, no man could ever approach perfection so closely as a man as Bill did as a child. He was an athlete, strong, deep-chested, broad of back, sound in every limb, graceful and active as a kitten; he had a deep philosophy, everlasting good nature; he was guileless, frank and unspoiled, fearless, his eyes bright, his teeth even and white, his smile bewitching, his head held proudly; the touch of his hand and foot were gentle, firm, sure.

An hour later Ben Thorp went out of the house, leaving Bill sleeping the sleep of the just. As he stood by his car he turned and looked back, searching for the boy's face at the window, but it was not there. Ben sat down and though his hand reached for the brake to release it, it rested there motionless, and he sat dreaming.

A curious expression, almost of pain, came over his face for an instant. Then he shook his head, ever so little, released the brake, and drove away.

He went home and sat down with a heavy volume beside him. In a few moments he went to his office and rang for Miss Mills.

She came and he asked her a few questions; he paid no attention to her answers, but for the first time tried to see the woman, tried to see her as she was beneath the clothes that covered her, tried to see her strength, tried to see what manner of man child she could make if given the chance. Then he looked at her face and listened to her words, trying to tell what manner of mind she would give her child.

She went, and again Ben shook his head. She would not do, she would not do, nor would he do—for—even unto the third and fourth generation, though sometimes the second might be skipped.

A picture of Bill, the young giant, came back to him—his clear fearless eyes, unconscious of himself and in love with life. Bill's heritage was sure and safe, back into the dim past, father upon father, mother upon mother had been clean-living, honorable men and women. Ben closed his eyes and saw the boy, naked on the rug, flash from his back over to his stomach, saw his feet fly in the air and fall as gracefully as the lightest dancer's.

To have a boy like that, to know the joy of a son such as that son was! Oh, to find a woman who could be mother of such a boy as that, of ten boys like that, a tall woman, broad-shouldered, strong of wrist, of arm, of thigh, a woman proud, quiet, pure; a woman of intelligence, of education, of breeding, a sensible woman, a calm, quiet woman, to be the mother of his sons. His sons! His!

But he was Benjamin Thorpe, whose mother was not fit for such sons as that to look upon and whose father was unknown, though it was easy to tell what manner of man his father must have been, if one were willing to think of men low enough down the scale. He, Ben Thorpe, was the child of such a union and the day of miracles was past.

He looked at his great hands, pressed his fingers into his palms so that he could feel his own strength. With all modesty he knew his own brain, and that brain told him what the next generation might be. The next generation! Women were necessary for the next generation, unless one were willing to adopt sons, but he knew that no such sons would have their fair chance in the world

without a mother. He paid that tribute unconsciously. To adopt sons would be a quibble; it was an impossible idea and he was ashamed of it.

It is said that women long for children, picture them before they are conceived, are overwhelmed by their desire for them, and that men do not think of them with affection till long after they are born and show some signs of intellect. But Ben thought of them, and true to his ever present weakness thought only of male children. He wanted sons more than he wanted anything else in the world but the fear of his own right to be a father was always with him. It came and went, sometimes assuming gigantic proportions, sometimes disappearing almost completely. He had known his mother, but he had not known her or what she had been when he was born. Perhaps she had been a good woman then. It was conceivable that both his parents were decent, clean people. There had been tragedies before; youth, cursed by youth, had fallen before and perhaps there was no taint in him to pass on. But that "perhaps" swayed him backward and forward like a pendulum, between despair and agonizing uncertainty on one side and hope and plain evidence on the other. Could he, Thorpe, carry with him a damning curse?

The boy of the afternoon had roused his wildest desire for sons, before which desire everything else became futile, worthless, and sordid; curiously he thought more of the boy's body than of his mind. He had felt in him the perfection of motion; heavy as the child was, his touch had been light as air, every movement sure and the acme of grace. Ben, looking into the future, saw clearly enough the boy-man that he would be, he saw him with his eyes fast on a sweating back before him, swinging strong, his hands flashing forward, his sweep catching hard, his

muscles glistening beneath his skin, the strong and skilful and courageous oarsman in the Varsity shell; he saw him, fleet of foot, running, dodging, tackling, punting, the giant of the football field, and he heard the roar of thousands, doing him homage. He saw the boy supreme in physical attainment, for such was the brutish thought of Ben. His own days of physical achievement were over; he wished greatly to live those days again through his sons.

Ben had forgotten all about Bill's big brother as, jealous and despairing, he sat in his office with his eyes closed, seeing images on the closed lids. If he had not forgotten he might have taken some consolation from all the children who were so much his children. One day the boy's father had come, hesitating and consumed with fear. "No one knows that I have come to you," he said. "They tell me there is no hope but——"

"Who told you that?" Ben had asked, and so on and on.

An hour later the boy's weak, shrunken body had been in Ben's hands, hands so large that they almost hid the boy, so strong they could have crushed him into pulp. The mother saw the monster come into her house and trembled, saw the face that looked as though it could never smile, saw the man that looked as though he had been made to grind children to powder like the giant ogres of fairy stories. Then she had seen the child look up into his eyes and saw instead of fear an expression of happiness come on the boy's face. She saw her boy weakly raise his hand and touch Ben's head, saw his lips try to form a smile, and suddenly she knew that God had sent His servant to her and hers. Little children were not afraid of the ogre.

Finally, when the boy was nearly well and when, for an instant, Ben stood beside the bed with the boy's hand

in his, the same cold, hard face was there, the same calm, cold eyes, the same cruel mouth, and yet the mother saw the face of a ministering angel. Ben had hardly spoken to her through it all, even when the boy had been taken away and chopped to pieces and put together again right. Later on when it was all over and the boy was yelling for food, she broke down and tried to tell Ben how she felt about it all, and Ben said:

"Yes, yes. Remember, he is not to go too fast."

That had been a week before he spent an hour with the boy, watching him as he played in bed and waited another hour downstairs with Bill so that he might watch him as he slept. That was the end; the boy after that was nothing but a record.

While Ben, alone in his office, was dreaming he heard the door-bell ring and remembered that Charles Bull was coming to dinner with him. Bull was a lawyer and had been two or three years ahead of Ben at Harvard. They had been acquaintances then and had become close friends in Alden. Bull, compared with Ben, was small,—a slender, wiry man of enormous mental and physical energy. He played a remarkably good game of tennis and had no superior in Alden at squash and racquets; his thirty-five years rested lightly upon his athletics. He was an inveterate gambler, lived at his club, and was an able and pleasant man.

They were through dinner and in Ben's library when Bull spoke of Thaddius Octavius Thrall.

"I heard Thrall address the jury in the Curtis case to-day," he said. "That fellow's a marvel. I finished a case and dropped in to see how things were going in the Curtis case. It was luck, so far as I was concerned, but there were a dozen lawyers there with malice aforethought. Even Lyle and Bowers, the two best men we

have in Alden, were there and it was worth their while.

"There is no question on earth that Curtis is technically guilty, there is no question that he was grossly negligent. If he had done what the president of a bank is supposed to do instead of letting other people do it and taking their word for it that it was done right, the Farmers' Trust Company would n't have crashed and ruined all sorts of people. The responsibility was unquestionably Curtis's—but you understand. The point is that Curtis did not do anything wrong purposely, and it was Thrall's job to get him out of serving half a dozen years in jail for being lazy and a damn-fool, or practically that.

"I have n't heard the verdict, I imagine it won't be rendered until to-morrow, but I 'll bet Thrall gets him off. Cheeny, his partner, tried the case with Thrall assisting him, but Cheeny knows a good thing when he sees it and he let Thrall talk to the jury. I knew the general principles involved, but I didn't know the details until I heard Thrall. I've heard all the big ones round these parts make their speeches, but I never heard a man tell a complicated story the way he did. He made it so clear and simple that a child could have understood it and he made Curtis stand out as pure as driven snow. It was a masterpiece, there was no question about that. He's going to be one of the greatest trial lawyers in the country before he gets through."

"It's the same knack he had in college," Ben said. "He tutored a lot and was a genius at it. As you say, he could explain anything so that a child could understand it; and, what's more, he made them remember it, he put it into their heads and it stuck there. He started as a school-teacher out West somewhere and went to Harvard on a shoe-string and made good with a vengeance."

"And will go on making good with a vengeance or I'm mistaken," Bull said.

"He will unless the women get him," Ben answered.

"Crazy about women, is he?" Bull asked.

"He's crazy about anything that wears skirts, high, low or in-between. If the fool would only marry some decent woman and settle down he'd be all right, but he won't. He's square through and through and he'd be square with his wife, if he had one. As it is, he's pointed straight for trouble."

"Oh, nonsense!" Bull laughed. "He's a wise bird, he knows the law; he'll keep clear."

"The law be damned!" Ben exclaimed. "I've seen too much of the illegal, the non-legal side of it."

Again Bull laughed. "You've talked to him about it, I imagine," he said.

"Talked to him! I should say I had, and I might as well talk to the weather, for all the good it does. Of course it's none of my business if he wants to go to hell, spoiling his career, his whole life, on the way. The old rabbit will do anything on earth for me except that. I found him in college when he was in a bad way and helped him a bit, nothing more than any man would do for another. It didn't cost me a cent and didn't take any time or trouble, but he's always taken the position that he owes everything he has to me. Of course it's nonsense, but it's a fact, yet even so I have n't any more influence with him so far as women are concerned than a fly. It's a disease."

"Why don't *you* get married?" Bull asked, switching the subject.

"I've never felt the call," Ben said. "Why don't you?"

Bull looked at him for a moment with a curious expression on his face. "For exactly the same reason Thrall

does n't, I suppose," he said. "I'm nuts on the ladies. I never could stick to one."

"You! What on earth are you talking about?"

"Never suspected it, did you?" Bull said. "It's so, nevertheless. And I guess it's a disease, as you say; and, what's more, it's hereditary."

"What sort of joke are you trying to make?" Ben asked.

"It's no joke, it's a very serious business. Drink is n't a flea bite to it. You've heard, of course, of men who can't leave drink alone, the fellows who swear off and stay off it for a longer or shorter time, and who go off on drunks periodically, perhaps only once or twice a year. Well, it's that way with me, only with me it's not whisky; and, take my word for it, women are a whole lot worse than getting drunk. If a man's alone in the world, as I am, he does n't harm any one but himself when he drinks himself into a stupor and stays that way, but when a woman is involved he's got to be damned careful, especially if he has any self-respect and a bit of pride. It's one thing to pick up some dame who has been over the hurdles before or is bent on taking them with any man she can get, either for the money there is in it or because she's tired of the simple life and has the bug, it's quite another to find your charmer in your own walk of life, a decent, intelligent woman who believes in a single standard of morality."

"Not the single standard that is usually spoken of, I take it," Ben said.

"Exactly. Don't think I'm a bounder, Ben; I'm not. I've never led innocence astray yet, I've never led any woman away from the path she has set out to follow. But I think even you, with all your knowledge and all your medical experience, would be surprised if you knew how many women are not what they seem."

Ben shook his head. "No, I don't believe I should be surprised," he said. "I'll go farther than that; I believe that I know that sort of woman when I see her. It's in their mouths, a little, but mostly in their eyes and around their eyes. I did a bit of a job for Sam Lyle not long ago and we spoke of it. You know that he has studied faces for years, not as ordinary men study them, as a matter of course, but scientifically, on and off the witness-stand, in repose and otherwise, under strain and otherwise, and he told me very much the same thing. He says that he does n't make a mistake once in a coon's age and that nine tenths of it is in their eyes. He may get his dope from a man's chin or head or hands, even from his feet, but he always gets it from a woman's eyes. Have you ever noticed that?"

"Yes, I certainly have," Bull said, a little sadly.

"Suppose, just for amusement," Ben went on, "we remember this evening and I'll make a prophecy. I met a girl a dozen years ago, when I was about twenty. I've never made any study of the thing, scientific or otherwise; if I guess right it's intuitive, born in me. I've jumped at conclusions involuntarily ever since I can remember, ever since I was a kid. Well, anyway, the minute I saw this particular girl,—she was eighteen or nineteen then,—I made up my mind she would go wrong sooner or later. Of course she might marry and settle down to respectability and stay that way to the end of the chapter, but I doubted it. So far as I know nothing, either way, has happened yet. If it does I'll tell you, if it's public property. In the meantime, I've never felt the call, just as you've never had any love for booze."

"Thank Heaven you have n't!" Bull said. He smiled at Ben, whimsically. "But I do believe in moderation in all things, even if I don't practise it. I was awfully fond of

my old man, I loved him as much or more than most sons love their fathers, but I've cussed him up and down and sideways ever since he died, five years ago, which naturally is no thing to do, harboring a grudge against a man who is dead.

"But I did n't understand it till he was dead and I began straightening out his affairs. I knew something before then, of course, and suspected more, but not a tenth, not a thousandth part of it. My mother was and still is a quiet, domestic, home-loving woman, and so far as I know she never suspected a thing. The Governor was seventy-five when he died. I was the youngest of six children, the others were girls. He was homely as a hedge fence, a little dried parchmenty old man, and, what's more, his legs had been pretty well out of commission for years; he never walked more than a few steps at a time and then crawled along with two canes.

"He was a remarkably able man, he was mixed up in a dozen big things, he was director of all sorts of big corporations, his mind was as keen, or keener, the day he died than it had ever been. He had always been fond of us and had always been good to us, he was no slouch of a father. He loved my mother, from beginning to end, there is n't the shadow of a doubt about that, and he never was away from home very much, even after all the girls were married and I was down here. He said he did n't care particularly about visiting round in his daughters' houses and Mother did; the result was that she went off and left him, for a few days at a time, perhaps once a month.

"I'd always known that he liked women, he admitted it himself. He liked to have women in the house, and as Mother liked to have them, it was simple. They entertained a good deal and Father was very likely to suggest,

casually, that this woman or that be invited. He never forced the matter in the least, and as the women he wanted were entirely respectable and pleasant, Mother always asked the ones he wanted. It was all perfectly conventional and proper; there was never the slightest suggestion of an affair, never an atom of even mild scandal or gossip.

"Women liked him, there was no question about that, homely and unattractive and crippled as he was. Men liked him and he liked men, but he fascinated women; the women who came to the house admitted it with varying degrees of frankness, depending on their nature. But, as I said, everything was eminently respectable. I wondered sometimes whether, in view of that predilection of his, he did n't wander from the straight and narrow path and travel a bit with ladies who were charming, but who would not be entirely at home in the family circle. I suspected strongly that on occasions he found diversion where conversation was not so strait-laced, and consequently a bit livelier than it was at home. If he did it seemed as though those occasions must be few and far between; certainly they were most circumspectly managed. Not a bit of evidence ever reached me, nor, I believe, any other member of the family.

"Then he died, so suddenly that there was not time for me to reach him before the end came. I, being the only son and a lawyer, had to straighten out his affairs; and then, curiously enough, the deluge came. It was, I think, a strange commentary on female nature. One by one a dozen women—seven, to be exact—dropped in on me or arranged to see me, to talk. That's all there was to it, just talk. When the first one came I suspected blackmail or trouble of some sort, but not a bit of it: it was just talk, talk, talk. They seemed to think that it was

their duty to tell me what a wonderful man my father had been; also, they had to talk off some of their emotion, and their emotions were all pretty much alike. They had all loved him; and, so far as they were concerned, they were all free to love any one they liked, not one of them was married.

"They ran from a well-known actress of sixty-odd who had known him, 'oh, so intimately, for thirty years,' to another actress of thirty who owed everything she had in the world to him. In between were one stunning divorcée, two widows,—one of thirty-six or eight and another of fifty,—a business woman well known in the interior-decorating trade, and a wealthy spinster of great wealth and sufficient social position.

"So far as I could discover, he had n't spent a cent on any of them, he had n't even loaned them money to tide over temporary stringencies; they all said he had n't, they emphasized the point to prove the purity of their affection. I imagine he made them all small presents,—books, flowers, all sorts of inexpensive things,—but I don't believe he spent over two or three thousand dollars that way in his life. He had helped them, each according to her needs, by companionship, by intellectual association, by advice and counsel, or by using his influence in places high in their professions. Anyway, they could n't say enough pleasant things about him and not one of them knew how she would ever get along without him.

"What they had done for him I don't know. I did n't ask them and they did n't tell me; I guess they did different things; I suspected some and did n't suspect others. How many there were scattered about besides those seven, Heaven only knows. And that, son, is why I say, 'Damn this business of heredity.'"

Those last words bored deep into Ben's mind. He had

been thinking of heredity, and the third and fourth generation, hardly an hour before.

"I often wonder what manner of man *my* father could have been," he said. "You know, of course, that I don't know who he was, not a thing about him."

"Yes, I knew that. I imagine he was not much like my father." Bull smiled when he said that, the point was evident.

"Perhaps, and yet here I am. I'd give a lot to know how I happen to be here."

"What good would the knowledge be, unless it gave you a family? Do you mean that?"

"No, I don't mean that. I have never missed not having any relatives, perhaps because I loved the man who adopted me. It's the heredity part, Charley: I'd like to know what sort of stuff is in me."

"Don't you know that?"

"How can I? Heredity is a queer thing: it sometimes skips the second generation."

"Then your grandfather must have been a pretty good sort, even if he was a misogynist."

"I wonder if he was. Perhaps my father was a wild and wayward son."

"In any case, old man, I believe you're better off as you are. I guess misogyny is better than the other extreme. Just the same, you ought not to carry it so far as misogyny."

Ben laughed. "Using big words, are n't you? By one chance in a million I know what they mean."

"And you can't cure yourself?"

"Apparently not."

"Then don't blame Thrall and me because we can't cure ourselves. And since you're so blamed ignorant, I'll tell you something else. This woman business, so far as


it concerns men like Thrall and me,—I suppose it is the same with Thrall as it is with me,—is n't just animal,—that's an infinitesimal part of it. There's something about a good-looking, intelligent woman, something that emanates from her person and her mind, that I have to have, just as I have to have food and water. I don't know what it is, but I must have it, just the same. I've gotten it for years from women that never took the big hurdle or ever thought of taking it. I like that kind better than the other; if I had to choose between the two sorts, if I could only have one sort for the rest of my life I'd choose the straight ones. As it is—well, some day one woman may be all sufficient, but it has n't happened yet. What a line of talk, and what an egotistical bounder I am!"

"Momentary remorse for your sins?" Ben said, smiling.

"Sins be damned! The world's the world, is n't it?"

"Yes, and it takes all sorts of people to make the world."

They let it go at that.



CHAPTER XIV

THE winter passed and spring came.

There was a banker in Alden named White, who was not only a man of great personal wealth but who had great influence in the community. J. Newcomb White had a grandson who, being in dire straits, had chanced to come under Ben Thorpe's care and had been sent home whole. When Ben was invited to dine with the Whites his inclination was to say "No," with very little "thank you" attached to it, but the Children's Hospital, as always, needed money, the grandchild had been operated on there, and it might do harm if he did say "no." The Children's Hospital needed all the friends it could find, and it would never do to lose such of Mr. White's good will as it had obtained in assisting in the saving of his beloved grandson.

J. Newcomb White lived, not in a suburb,—no such plebeian word would apply to that great acreage of patrician estate,—but in the country, outside of Alden. Even the large house was hard to find among the stately trees, hundreds of yards along drives winding from the common highway. There was, in fact, nothing magnificent or palatial about the house, large as it was. To be sure, the stone of which it was built, taken from near-by quarries and unmarred by marks of tools, also formed pools, steps, walls, and the sides of formal gardens all about it; broad, tiled terraces, under the sky, loggias, under roof, were everywhere, with rugs and chairs, with tables, with all

sorts of things suggesting comfort and beauty. White and his architect had done well.

Ben left his little old car in an out-of-the-way corner. A man took his hat and coat and ushered him into a small room where Mrs. White, alone, was waiting for him. She arose, came toward him with outstretched hand, and said:

"There is no way, sir, that I know of, to thank you for having sent our boy back to us, unless you understand without my trying to explain."

"I understand, I hope."

"I know you do. Come to the others." And she led him to the others and almost immediately to dinner. It was an oft-told tale but better done this time than usual; there had been no mock heroics, no forced compliments, no mushy sentiment.

Beside Ben at dinner, at his left, was a Mrs. Wood,—sharp-faced, frail, flat-chested, nimble-tongued. At his right was Jean Vance, built for the gods to worship. Mrs. White could not be expected to know that if she wanted to make the evening as little unpleasant as possible for Ben, the thing to do was to seat Jean Vance as far from him as her table would permit.

Jean Vance had come prepared for an adventure. She had known that Ben was to be there and she had asked Mrs. White to put her beside him at dinner. The thirteen-year-old mark was still on her heart, the old wound still ached. She was going to do something about it,—just what she did not know, she would decide as she went along. But whatever happened, it was to be a real adventure and she had arrayed herself for it, methodically.

The talk at dinner was mostly feminine and largely of suffrage; it was as though a half-dozen women of great powers of elocution had been gathered together to win the

support of the same number of hidebound, old-fashioned men. Ben Thorpe sat through it all, listening to the sharp-eyed rat on his left tell how the female vote had reformed multitudes of sinners somewhere or other. She reeled off statistics that he tried to make check but could n't; he was very sure once that she had intended to say eight thousand when she said eighty, and she insisted that one per cent of the two million was two hundred thousand. No one seemed to care and Ben said nothing.

There was no personal talk, but a series of speeches, broken into presumably for the sake of emphasis and clearness but resulting in a wild jumble of ideas, confusing and worthless, without sufficiently accurate premises to make them even interesting. They spoke of the social evil as casually as most people talk of the weather.

Ben sighed with relief when the last course was finished and the men and women separated. It was a warm evening and the men went out of doors under the stars and smoked and talked of everything under the sun and stars but votes for women. Eventually, of course, the two sides of the house mingled again, but Ben, wearied past endurance with femininity, lighted a fresh cigar and strolled to a loggia to dodge the chatter as long as he was reasonably decent, and he walked straight into the trap that Jean Vance had set for him.

She appeared suddenly through a French window and turned on the lights of a table lamp. She was of course very much surprised to find Ben there, even though she had seen him remain outside after the other men had gone in and had seen him walk toward that very lamp. She had managed, without actually running, to get there before he could get away. She had, for the evening at least, foregone the pride which had for so long kept her from making advances to him.

"Oh, Doctor Thorpe, are you here? It is very warm inside." She had never called him Ben.

"Very warm."

"Do you mind if I sit here? I'd love to talk to you,—of course if you're quite willing."

"Naturally, I should be delighted." His voice had no delight in it.

"You are an old bear, are n't you?" she said, gaily.

"Another word for it is 'rude,' I suppose."

"You don't really enjoy being a bear, or rude, do you?" she asked, laughing sweetly.

"I imagine the bull did n't enjoy his visit to the china shop. Is n't your chair comfortable, or is the light shining in your eyes?"

She was moving her chair so that the light shone directly on her and so that she was quite close to him.

"Please don't stay unless you really want to," she said.

"I'm very comfortable and I understand that it is very hot indoors."

Jean wondered why he recalled her excuse for coming out. It was, really, an absurd excuse: it was not unpleasantly warm anywhere.

"I should really like you to tell me about your work. Will you?"

"What would you like to know?"

"You are in what people call the slums a great deal, are n't you?"

"Yes, 'slums' will do, I suppose."

"And what is your idea of the greatest need among those people?"

"Fewer slums, I should say."

"Of course, but how can that be brought about?"

"Do you suppose that if I knew I should have kept the secret until this delightful moment?"

Jean was a little discouraged. "But surely something can be done."

"Surely, and is being done constantly. City streets are swept more or less regularly, they need it constantly, but it is to be presumed that they are cleaner now, as a general thing, than they were a hundred years ago, and better paved."

"You don't want to tell me what you really believe, do you?"

"I will tell you anything I know."

"Are n't you working to help clean house?"

"With individuals, not the general problem."

"Is n't it the same thing?"

"The general problem is so enormous that no individual or any reasonable number of individuals can influence it perceptibly. I am not quite sure that I understand what you are driving at."

Jean was not quite sure herself and she wondered whether Ben knew it. He helped her out.

"I rather think you refer to the entire lack of luxuries, a general lack of comforts, the economical inefficiency of men, due in part to too much alcohol, the lax morals of both men and women, the stifling of the minds and bodies of children and the inability, or the lack of real desire, of all of them to improve their condition; in other words, the ignorance, inertia, and lack of money-making ability of the whole lot."

"That is exactly what I mean, and exactly what I, all thinking women, want to overcome."

"In a particular spot in Alden, all of Alden, or all of the world?"

"In all the world, naturally, but in Alden particularly."

"Do you think the franchise, given to women, will aid them in the work?"

"Of course."

"There are several things I do not understand. That is one of them."

"You know, don't you, that women will vote for prohibition?"

"What women?"

"Women with sense, and women with drunken husbands."

"Did you notice that five women and only two men drank cocktails before dinner to-night?"

"Chance, nothing more."

"Very likely. I simply mentioned the fact."

"I was very tired. I needed it." Jean tried to suggest a small excuse.

"I did n't notice you particularly. I counted the glasses for amusement."

"Did you count the glasses at dinner?"

"Four men drank nothing, one a glass of sherry."

"And the women?"

"Women, I believe, are very fond of champagne."

"I suppose so. It is harmless, as women drink it."

"Quite as harmless as the whisky that those other men drink."

Jean was n't getting anywhere. She had cornered Ben as the beginning of her adventure. The adventure was not beginning, but she believed that she could make any man interested in her if she tried.

"Of course," she said, "I am not an expert on prohibition or temperance, and the little I know about it I have learned through my serious work."

"I am afraid that I don't know what your work is."

"Women, young girls." Jean's work was spasmodic and hardly serious.

"I see."

"Yes, I give a great deal of time to it. We have working-girls' clubs and I am on committees connected with homes and refuges for girls."

"What sort of girls have you in your clubs?"

"Working-girls."

"Of course, I understand that, but are they attractive?"

"Personally, that is, physically and mentally?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no, I should hardly call them that."

"They come for amusement, I take it, rather than to be improved or saved?"

"We try both to amuse them and improve them, naturally."

"They come to be amused and improved according to a fixed schedule, in groups?"

"Yes, it can hardly be in any other way."

"And they come because they can't get their off-hour amusement the way they would like to; that is, they have no beaux. Was your idea of amusement when you were, say, eighteen to twenty-five, attending regulated hen parties?"

That idea had never occurred to Jean Vance and it was not an entirely pleasant one.

Ben continued: "The girls that don't come are the ones, generally speaking, that need incorporated chaperons, I imagine. Have you ever been in a public dance-hall, with or without a bar?"

"No, I have not."

"Why don't you go sometime? It is an inspiring spectacle. They range from those that are quite respectable to those that are simple man-traps. The ones in between contain your problems; the extremes don't need, or are beyond, amateur reform methods."

"Will you take me to some of them?"

"Which kind?"

"All kinds."

"That would be a serious undertaking. Naturally, I would not take you to the worst; it would do no good and might be very unpleasant for you."

"Why? I am not a child, I understand that sort of thing."

"If you do, why go?"

"Because I have never seen it, I have only heard about it. It would make me understand better what you call my problems."

"The hospitals and the prisons would serve your purpose quite as well, and I would not jeopardize my own respectability, if I were you."

"My respectability?"

"The chance is slight, of course, but raids are made occasionally and a name once in print is hard to erase." Ben was exaggerating the probabilities a little.

"I'd take that chance."

"I would n't if I were you."

"Suppose, then, we begin at the other end and work down as far as you are willing to go."

"You dance, of course?"

"Of course."

"I don't. There would be the question of a partner."

"Would it be necessary to dance?"

"If you did n't you might as well go carrying a reform banner. People go there to dance. Incidentally, if you were to go, how would you dress?"

"Why, as I am now, I suppose."

"Then a reform banner would hardly be appropriate."

"I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, you do."

"If I do, you are very rude."

"Undoubtedly, but that was not my intention. You have been trying to make me appreciate your gown, and you, ever since you came here. I simply want you to know that you have succeeded."

Jean Vance had been doing exactly that. She was entirely sure of herself and of late years she had gone farther and farther in the matter of clothes until she had reached the irreducible minimum, and she was wearing the irreducible minimum that night. Studied posings, manipulation of her arms, the moving of her legs under the thinnest clinging silk, graceful turnings in her chair, had all shown him in the most complete detail what a perfect female specimen she was. Her color and her complexion were perfect and her eyes had exactly the proper proportion of lure and reserve and her lips the most subtle charm. In spite of the poor progress she was making conversationally she was not to be discouraged. She was very skilful; it had never been necessary for her to make an effort to attract a man, the trouble had been to keep the crowd well thinned out. Notwithstanding the difficulties she knew she was facing now, she was resolved not to fail.

"I know that you are a remarkable man," she said. "Perhaps I should say an unusual man, but I hardly expected anything so crude as that."

"Just what did you expect when you arranged this charming tête-à-tête? I quite appreciate that it was arranged."

Jean Vance was no fool. She had arranged it and to deny it might bring forth proof and leave her no defense. The simple thing was to laugh, so she laughed. Then she made a mistake.

"So you really take it for granted that women pursue you?"

Ben Thorpe's only answer was a smile that said that he understood perfectly that the victim was squirming.

"I imagine such conceit must be great comfort, if it can be maintained," she said.

Again Ben only smiled, and Jean lost her temper.

"You're a beast!" she said. "All men are beasts," she added and she changed her voice so as to take the sting from her first statement.

"They have changed, have they?" Ben said. "They used all to be liars. Has there been any such improvement in women?"

"I should think that you'd know what women are doing for themselves."

"I don't. If I did I should n't be an obscure individual in a big city. I'd be the greatest man in the world. What I'm interested in is what they are doing for, or to, the other half of the world."

"I can tell you that."

"I don't believe you can."

"Any woman can tell you, any woman of intelligence. I understand that your ideas about women are elementary, that you're intolerant and very dense so far as they are concerned."

"Undoubtedly. I have very few ideas on the subject, only curiosity and possibly some misgivings."

"Tell me about your misgivings."

"They are trite, more or less superficial things; I am sure they would be uninteresting."

"Your ideas uninteresting? Absurd! Tell me."

"You do not object to plain talk? Many women don't, nowadays, they seem to enjoy it."

"I'm not a child."

"Then I'll put to you a question that was put to me a few days ago. A man I know well came to me for ad-

vice, apologetically, under the impression that I, for some reason, could help him. He has three daughters, the eldest came out last winter. He is rather beyond middle age and the present younger generation differs greatly from his generation of thirty years ago. He was, and so far as I know still is, greatly worried about his daughters. His first fears were raised at a dinner. He had been drifting along presuming that his girls were normally sweet, pure, unsophisticated young things, until what happened at the dinner set him thinking and he investigated. At the dinner was a girl of eighteen or nineteen. There was a prolonged conversation, in which she took active part, about her legs. She enjoyed talking about them. She had gone to a masked ball in costume, or lack of it, as a page in doublet and hose. Men had complimented her at the ball and were keeping it up, teasing her a little, and she was arguing the advantages of strong, serviceable, versatile legs over graceful symmetrical legs, the men taking the side of the latter. There was not a reproving voice at the table. If the girl blushed it was with pleasure at the attention she was receiving from older men.

"My friend knew that the girl was an intimate friend of his daughter's and he began to think. A few days later he happened to be in the living-room of a country club and saw several girls smoking and drinking. His daughter was among them. It was apparent that they had had at least two cocktails apiece. She was sitting on a lounge with another girl and three men—the lounge would have been full with two less—the girls had a man on each side of them. As it happened he knew that the other girl was married. She was resting against the shoulder of a man who he knew had a reputation that was none too good. He discovered later that her intimacy with the man was well known and that the affair was dis-

cussed openly and with many conjectures by their friends. The husband was laughed at or sympathized with, depending on the point of view.

"That night he happened to overhear the conversation of his daughter and three friends who were playing cards in the next room. One of the men, quite unintentionally, made a slip in choosing a word, thereby turning an innocent remark into a very vulgar one, to call it nothing worse. There was silence for an instant and then a burst of laughter, entirely unrestrained. My friend was appalled.


"Shortly after that he discovered that two of his daughters were reading a book which for good reasons had been published and distributed privately. Next he heard the same two discussing, with entire frankness, a play which he, himself, had found so coarse as to be revolting.

"The climax came when he learned that one of his daughter's friends had gotten into trouble and had been turned out of the family physician's office with the statement that he could do nothing for her. She had been no whit abashed, but accepted the whole thing as a bit of hard luck. Her friends took the same point of view and a married one, of experience, came to her aid and told her of a complacent practitioner. She pawned enough of her belongings to pay expenses, went away on a visit to a conspiring friend, and came home rejoicing and not in the least repentant.

"With all this staring him in the face and with three very beautiful daughters on his hands, he came to me for advice, apparently under the delusion that between us we could work a miracle overnight and reform society."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I sympathized with him and told him not to blame the men; God made them what they are. Women



had taken female destiny into their own hands and were fighting God and nature; I could not see that any good would come from interfering in the battle."

"And what has your friend done?"

"Entered the fray, naturally, and his daughters are firmly convinced that he has gone crazy and that the heavens have fallen. It is time for me to go, I must be in town before twelve."

"You are going back to town?" The suggestion was plain.

"Yes, may I take you?" Perhaps Ben had decided on an adventure of his own.

"Could you? You have an open car, haven't you? The Fraziers brought me, but their car is closed and they insist on keeping it shut up tight. It's stifling." Jean was making the spring warmth work for her again.

"I shall be very glad to take you."

A few minutes later they drove through the Whites' lodge gates and out on the highway. Jean was triumphant. She had made the bear talk, and when a man is willing to talk to a woman much can be done with him. And, too, he had made no objection to driving her home, which meant that he would be alone with her for nearly an hour. He had been a bear, almost a beast, all evening, but he had suddenly changed. Perhaps he was human after all, perhaps after all these years he was succumbing to the lure of her. She had not accomplished much so far, but it was a good beginning and she was wondering how much farther she could go that night. No man was impossible to twist round her finger if she wanted to do it, but it would n't do to go too fast. Her confidence, which had waned earlier in the evening, came back to her.

Ben drove on toward the city. He had seen her glance up as he entered the large room with Mrs. White and

her expression had made him instantly suspicious that she had been waiting for him to appear. It had been nothing more than the merest indication that something was on foot, but that suspicion had been strengthened during dinner. Under the lamp in the loggia he was sure that Jean had some very definite goal in mind.

"Do you know where I live?" she asked.

"No, along Orchard Street somewhere, is n't it?"

"Yes, in the Willow Apartments, at Willow Street. You said you had an engagement; am I taking you out of your way?"

"It's at the Children's Hospital. I can come back."

"But we pass it. Shall you be long?"

"Ten minutes."

"I'll wait. I'm in no hurry."

"That is very kind of you."

"One has to be nice to bears," she said, with a merry laugh.

They were before the hospital. Ben drove into the court and left her. He was gone more than ten minutes and the time passed slowly. The automobile clock said that it was twelve o'clock. Her gloved hand ran back and forth along the top of the back of the seat; her fingers found a piece of sharp metal, a tack which was coming out of the leather. She had been wondering whether she could string out that evening with any advantage, when she found the sharp bit of metal. It gave her an idea, which she thought was rather clever.

She took a gold pin, which was purely ornamental, from her gown and ran its sharp point gingerly over her arm. Her gloves were in the way, so she took them off and drew the point along her soft white skin. It didn't hurt, much. She put her gloves in the pocket of her cloak, found her handkerchief and waited, with her eyes

on the hospital door. Finally Ben came out and without the slightest hesitation she scratched the white skin of her forearm where it was softest, just below the elbow. She saw that the pin had made a line about two inches long and that blood drops came from it. She pushed the pin under the gloves in her pocket, put her handkerchief over the scratch, and drew her cloak about her so that it covered her arms.

"I'm sorry to have kept you so long," Ben said.

"It makes no difference, it's a wonderful night."

They drove from the hospital court to the city street. Jean knew that his office was somewhere near Willow Street. She waited until they were well away from the hospital, then she said:

"Is your office somewhere near here?"

"Yes, why?"

"I cut myself a little on a rusty nail in the car. It rather hurts. Could you put some antiseptic on it for me?"

She showed him her arm. She had done a good job, her arm was covered with blood; to all appearances the cut might have been severe.

"Of course." He sent the car ahead rapidly. "That's too bad. How did you do it?"

She indicated the tack.

"It was very careless of me!"

They went into his house. She threw off her cloak and the scarf from about her head. He opened the office door and turned on the lights.

"Just a second," he said, and went out. He returned quickly.

"Sit here." He pointed to a large Morris chair. He put a towel on the arm of the chair and her arm on it, got a basin with hot water, and washed away the blood. She

lay back in the chair, comfortable and content. She was a clever woman.

He poured some liquid on a bit of gauze. "It may sting a little," he said.

She only smiled.

He applied the antiseptic to the wound. "Hurt?"

"Not a bit." She smiled at him and dropped her head back on the cushion. He sat beside her, holding her arm.

"Cured!" he said.

She opened her eyes again.

"We'll give it another dose for luck and let it dry."

He did, and put the bottle and cloth on the table. He took the towels and threw them toward a basket near the washstand. Then he came and sat down on the arm of the chair. She laid her arm across his knees.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Not a bit."

"Arm all right?"

"Perfect."

"Comfortable?"

"Very."

He sat beside her and waited. He did not have to wait long. Her left hand fell from the other arm of the chair and found its way to the back of her head, then to the bit of ribbon on her shoulder, then along the bosom of her gown and down to his hand, where it rested quietly for an instant. Then it started upward again. She drummed with her fingers on his shirt-front, then went higher and ran her finger-tips over his eyelids and into his hair; her eyes were half closed.

"Do you like me a little, Ben?" she whispered.

"How could a man help liking you?" he said.

She smiled; she forgot all that had happened during a dozen years. "Why do you like me?" she asked.

He did not speak, but his hand went over her, over her arms, her neck, to her cheeks and lips, to her hair. She waited till he took his hand away and then she put her head on his breast. Again she waited, but he did not move. She turned her face upward to his, she put her hands on his shoulders. After a long time she fell back in her chair, her heart beating hard.

Easy, oh, so easy! Any man was easy. People had told her that no woman could do anything with Thorpe, and she had brought him to her feet in a few short hours, as soon as she had tried.

But now that he was there, what should she do with him? Her idea had been to laugh at him when she had won, but somehow she did n't want to laugh, there seemed to be nothing to laugh at and she was a little afraid of him; she had never felt before quite as she felt then. Her heart was beating fast, her blood was hot, there was a wild passion in her. Passion she had known before, but she had never known before such passion for a man as she knew then. There was some intangible thing about him that made her tremble, she wanted him to fondle her, to love her.

Ben was looking straight into her eyes.

"Don't you want me?" she whispered.

"Want you?"

"Yes, to love." Her voice was a whisper.

"To love?"

"Yes, to love, just for to-night."

"You are sure that you are asking for no other love, now or at any other time?"

"Yes, sure."

She closed her eyes, waiting for him to come and take her.

Ben rose and stood looking down on her,

"No," he said, "I don't want you, for to-night or for any other night or for any other time."

It took a moment for his words to penetrate her whirling, fevered brain and a longer time for her to understand just what he meant. Then she opened her eyes and saw him standing before her, cool and calm. She sprang to her feet, her eyes aflame, her hand on her bosom, which rose and fell quickly; her hot breath rushed through her clenched teeth.

Perhaps 't is true that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, for Jean Vance was on the verge of fury beyond description, and Ben Thorpe knew it.

"Stop," he said, "just where you are."

She half mumbled, half screeched the one word, "Wretch!" and started toward him, but started uncertainly, as though she did not know what she meant to do. From somewhere came a dash of cold water straight into her face, a very little of it, but enough to send her back.

"Don't get hysterical," he said. "It is not necessary, nor becoming. Standing on your head has made you a little uncertain of yourself."

The woman, half-way between mad rage and weak collapse, heard but did not understand; yet curiosity was active even at such an absurd moment.

"You must have stood on your head, you know, to scratch your arm as you did. Miss Mills——" She saw Ben nod to some one behind her.

Miss Mills!

Jean Vance stared at Ben Thorpe, trying to comprehend what it all meant, why everything was so queer, why she was there at all, who Miss Mills was. She didn't see any Miss Mills, but there was some one holding her arm and there was a hand somewhere on her back. She

turned and saw a woman in a nurse's costume, a calm-eyed, unemotional woman. How long had she been there? How had she come in? How much had she heard? How—how—— Jean Vance fainted.

Some time later she heard voices from a long way off. The words were not distinct at first, but soon she could put a few of them together and later she quite understood what the voices were saying.

"Sorry that you had to get up again so late."

"It's nothing, I was reading. What fools women are!"

"This one is a rampant suffragist, and an amateur reformer."

"They're all queer." Silence for a second, then, "I ought to know; I'm one."

"I wonder sometimes if you are."

"I am; take my word for it, even if I don't show it—much. How shall we get her home? Let's send for an ambulance." Then Jean heard laughter.

Jean did not hear Ben's answer to that suggestion, but she heard him strike a match and smelled tobacco smoke. She did hear him say:

"Here is the pin she scratched herself with; I knew she had done it purposely. It was in the pocket of her coat; you had better put it back there."

That was the last she heard Ben say that night. A few minutes later she stood up and, in a dazed sort of way, let the nurse put on her cloak and lead her to the door. Miss Mills walked the two blocks to the Willow Apartments with her and left her without a word.

Jean Vance had set out to play a game. It was her own game, to be played for her own amusement and at Ben's expense. It had gone a lot farther than she had ever meant it to go. She herself had gone farther, in a wild

moment, than she had ever supposed she could go, and the man had played the game far better than she, and had played it with vile cruelty. He had goaded her, led her on, tempted her, and then, when he had made a fool of her and had made her confess her passion, he had done worse than laugh at her.


Jean Vance was not a good sport, perhaps, but no woman can be expected to be a good loser when she has been treated as she has been. A man has no right to fight back; he may defend himself but that is all he may do. Thorpe had understood her and her little farce from the very beginning and instead of laughing at her and leaving her, which would have been bad enough, he had humiliated her, insulted her, methodically.

Miss Vance thought of the scratch on her arm and what a fool she had been about it. Stand on her head! She would have had to do that or close to it to scratch her arm so. The remembrance of her own folly made her more angry still.

Suppose he should tell people what she had done! Suppose the nurse were to talk about her! How could she face people who knew?

Jean Vance went to bed that night almost in hysterics and tossed and turned in agony. She could have murdered Ben Thorpe with joy if she had been able to. She calmed down later on and decided on a more subtle revenge,—just what, she did not know, but it would be something that he would never forget even if she had to wait years for the time to come.

Ben, after Jean Vance had left his house, thought of the prophecy he had made to Charley Bull. And he thought, too, of the words he had spoken years before to Austen Lee, about what there was to see in Jean's eyes.



"You see danger, son, the greatest danger in the world, and if you 're wise you 'll run away from it, you 'll keep going till you 're dead-sure it can't catch you." And then to Jean herself: "You know that I meant what I said, if Austen does n't."

CHAPTER XV

THREE days after Ben was sure that Jean Vance had gone out of his life for ever, Tim Higgins entered it.

No one was at all surprised at what happened when the Right Honorable Timothy Higgins, being ten and the son of a cab-driver, decided that Providence had selected him to play a real part in the doings of a rather drab world. Accordingly he closed his ears to all alarms of automobile horns and shot around a corner on his bicycle at a speed that in any circumstances would have been very unwise, and in the circumstances existing at the moment was disastrous.

Tim, when he set about doing a thing, did it right. No flivver should be honored by him, if he knew it. He selected a high-grade, high-powered, shiny limousine, he did, that cost, fitted complete, 'most ten thousand dollars or maybe more. He didn't do a very good job, at that, so far as he himself was concerned, but the bicycle passed away without a struggle. Only the front wheel of the limousine went over his legs and the rear wheel missed him completely. Of course the fact that he slid on his face for at least a mile before the automobile caught up to him, and further because before he slid he landed on his head from maybe a hundred or two feet in the air, made his general appearance and momentary lack of interest in the event as a whole look more serious than they really were.

First to come to Tim's side was the lady of the limousine, followed closely by her chauffeur and a number of bystanders. Ben, having seen the whole thing from a distance, arrived at the same time as the first policeman. They forced their way through the crowd, the woman found herself one of the mob, watching Ben Thorpe on his knee beside the boy. In a moment he rose with Timothy in his arms.

"Whose car is this?" he asked.

"Mine." The woman emerged from the common people. It was Hope Lee.

"Tell your man to take me to the Children's Hospital, please. Don't worry, Hope, the boy's all right." The chauffeur heard and needed no further orders.

"Seventeenth and Orchard Streets," Ben said, and half to the cop and half to the lady, "Will you take care of my car?"

The limousine sped on its way. The lady looked at the cop, the cop at the lady; then as one man they looked at the dirty, dilapidated little runabout of which Ben Thorpe had left them sole guardians.

The cop, habit being strong, took out his note-book. The lady, being bored by such details, stepped into the poor excuse for an automobile and started the engine. The officer, being a man of action, stepped in beside her and they went off together, on the trail of the limousine.

Hope Lee and the officer of the law drove to the Children's Hospital. On the way she said, "Who is he?" She wondered if the officer knew.

"Who is he—oh, him,—don't you know? Doc Thorpe. I s'posed avirybody knew him."

Miss Lee did not argue that this might be an exaggeration. "I've heard of him, of course," she said. The officer did not suggest that it sounded fishy.

She went into the hospital and after some difficulty learned that Dr. Thorpe had Master Higgins on the operating-table. Some time later she learned that one broken leg, one bent one, and a lot of fine-and-dandy bruises and scratches were the sum total of Master Timothy's injuries, and that he might expect a rapid recovery. She tried to see Ben, but could not, and went her way, leaving word that his car was in the hospital yard.


Ben called her on the telephone that night and told her that the boy would come out all right and thanked her for taking care of his car.

"You were a trump, Hope, as you always are. The accident was n't your man's fault, I saw the whole thing. Don't worry about that part of it."

"Won't you come and see me, Ben, and cheer me up? I feel terribly about the boy. Come to dinner—can't you come to-morrow night?—wait a minute." She spoke to some one in the room. "There 'll only be Father and Mother and we 'll play bridge."

Ben went, and played bridge, and then, as luck would have it, worked twenty hours a day for two weeks. Coincidentally with the ending of that rush of work Timothy Higgins expressed for the hundredth time his desire to see the big Doc who had been 'round first off, the request being, perhaps, further evidence of the fascination the huge brute had for children. Timothy had passed from the big Doc's care as soon as he passed the interesting stage of broken leg and the possibility of internal injury and, in passing, had taken up his abode in a private room which he appreciated but did not understand.

The big Doc, hearing of Tim's request, dropped in one afternoon and found the patient sitting up in bed and being read to by a visitor. When he entered the room the visitor stopped reading and smiled, but said nothing.



Ben stood at the foot of the bed and looked at the boy. "Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"Nothin', now."

"But I thought you sent for me. I was afraid you'd had another accident."

That made Timothy laugh. "What could happen to me here?"

"Nothing, I suppose, unless you fell out of bed." Ben was wondering why the boy was there and not in the ward. Perhaps Hope was at the bottom of it. He glanced at her, then turned back to the boy.

"Well, son, so you don't want me, after all?"

"I did, I was sorta lonely, but I'm not now. Miss Lee is readin' to me."

"And I'm interrupting; that's it, is it?"

"She reads to me all the time; it's great. She don't mind you bein' here." Timothy did not know why he had wanted to see the big Doc and would not have told why if he had known. Tim made a suggestion. "Sit down a while and listen to her read; it's great."

Ben laughed. "I'm sorry that I can't stay; I'd like to. Perhaps Miss Lee would not like to read to me."

"Sure she would! She likes readin' to everybody. She said so."

Ben turned to Hope. "Is that so?" he asked.

"Of course it is."

"You are Miss Hope Lee, are n't you?" His by-play was for Timothy's benefit.

"Yes, Doctor Thorpe."

"And this is your special patient?"

"Yes, Doctor Thorpe." She looked up at him with an expression that was half sweetness and half devilry. It was an expression he knew well.

"Does your patient behave himself, always?"

"Yes, indeed, he's very good, always. Aren't you, Tim?"

"Sure I am!"

"If by any chance he is n't good, let me know. We have a spanking-machine downstairs."

Tim grinned.

"At least your patient is doing very well," Ben said. "He'll be perfectly well before long; and he was mighty lucky to begin with."

"Tim, Doctor Thorpe says you were lucky to get all smashed up. What do you think of that?"

Tim did n't get the point and Ben explained it to him and said good-by. He beckoned to Hope and she went out into the hall with him.

"Have you done all this for the kid?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Do you come here every day?"

She nodded again. He did not say anything, but looked down at her with just a suspicion of a smile on his lips.

"I'll take you home, if you're going before long," he said.

"I was going to walk."

"Come to think of it, I have n't my car; it's sick. I'll walk down with you."

"Let me know when you're ready to go," she said.

He sent up word when he was ready. On the way down Orchard Street Hope asked him to come to dinner, but he could not. "Ask me for another night," he said, "and we'll go to the theater, if you don't mind playing with an old man."

"Silly, silly," she laughed.

They arranged their theater party and went and on their way home had ice-cream at the same drug store in which they had had it twelve years before, when they had

been skating and had arranged to be brother and sister, secretly.

Ben saw Hope two or three times after that in Timothy's room before the young man was discharged, cured, and accordingly passed from Ben's life, to follow in his father's footsteps and become a taxi-driver of considerable merit but little, if any, fame.

One night a month later Ben was sitting in his library. It was almost eleven o'clock and bedtime. He had been reading, but had put his book down and was blowing smoke rings into the still air. He was very comfortable in his big chair and very tired and his pipe was doing finely, but in even such a harmless thing as this habit was strong. To read, provided the book served some useful purpose, was not to waste time, but to sit blowing smoke rings was, and Ben had n't been at it for more than two minutes when the knowledge that he had started to go to bed and ought to go took precedence over physical comfort and the almost perfect, curling rings.

Bed was just about to win when the game was called off entirely. The telephone rang. Ben answered it and heard Hope's voice.

"Ben?"

"Yes."

"I am speaking for Doctor Swift—no, I am speaking for myself. Can you come here? We—he—needs help. I asked him if I might ask you."

"Yes, I'll come, of course. You're not at home, are you?"

"No, at four-twenty-one Willow Street, third floor, right."

He asked Hope what the trouble was, took two bags from his office, and drove away.

Number 421 Willow Street was a shabby enough flat-house, though there were many worse in Alden. No

father was about. A new baby was arriving in the back room, three children were asleep in the middle room, and a boy lay on the bed in the front room, which was ordinarily the living-room. A woman from the neighborhood was helping Dr. Swift. Hope let Ben in and led him to the boy, who would pass into sunlight or into darkness before the night was done.

Twice—once at twelve o'clock and again at two—Hope went through the deserted streets alone to a drug store.

Ben spoke very little, she hardly at all. Hour after hour passed, long hours of constant vigilance, of hard work for both of them. Dr. Swift had told Ben what he knew and Ben had taken the job off his hands. At four o'clock their work was done. For fifteen minutes Ben had been motionless, watching and waiting.

Then he straightened up and turned to Hope, who was in a chair close by.

"All right," he said. Though the light was dim he saw her clearly enough and saw her face brighten. He took a step or two away from her and then slowly turned back, as though something had caught his eye. She was still looking at him. It was her eyes that he had seen and it was her eyes that made him turn back. He stood perfectly calm and stared at her, straight into her brown eyes, coldly, critically. Her eyes were sparkling with tears. He had never seen her tears before.

Hope did not seem to mind; she smiled a very little. She raised her hand and pressed his fingers.

"Good business, Ben," she said.

"What are you doing here? How did you happen to be here?"

"Mrs. Bailey used to be my nurse. I came to see her this afternoon and found her with her boy; the baby was n't expected so soon. You can imagine the rest."

"Where is her husband?"

"He is a locomotive engineer; we could not reach him."

"Could n't you get a nurse?"

"Have n't I done well enough?"

Ben's scrutiny began again. "Yes, you have done very well, better than——"

"Be careful! A nurse is coming in the morning."

"She will be useful."

She nodded and smiled. Ben walked to the boy's bedside and stood watching him in the shaded light. Then he spoke to Hope, who was sitting sideways on a small straight chair, her arm on its back.

"You must be pretty well played out, Hope. You're not used to this sort of thing."

"A night like this makes me feel that I'm not altogether useless. I made—I asked Doctor Swift to let me send for you. I did n't try to get a nurse for to-night: I wanted to do it and I wanted to be with you when you worked, to watch you. Say something, Ben! say something!"

Ben did not say anything, but he smiled.

"If you won't, of course I can't make you. Are n't you hungry?"

"Yes."

"I'll make you some coffee, and there is some cold meat and bread, or would you rather have eggs? It is almost breakfast-time."

He followed her into the small kitchen.

"How about——" He nodded to the door of the back room.

"They went to the hospital hours ago. Didn't you know?"

"No, I did n't."

"You old stupid! There was racket enough to wake

the dead. Mrs. Bailey's sister has come to take care of the other children; she's asleep, I suppose."

Hope boiled coffee, scrambled eggs, made toast, and Ben Thorpe sat and watched her do it. He telephoned to Florence Mills to come and when she came he took Hope home and then he had an hour or two of sleep.

The night at the Bailey flat, with Hope, was the third in which his sleep had been cut down to two or three hours. He was tired the next day, dead tired, and he was very glad, when evening came, that, barring accidents, the night was his to do with as he liked.

He had had a hard day, an unusually hard day. There had been only the usual routine, but his work had been very hard to do, harder than his weariness could account for. He was depressed, almost melancholy. Suddenly, from somewhere out of the great unknown, a curious sensation of sadness had fallen upon him.

He had dinner alone, at home, and when he had finished he went to his library and took the book that he had been reading the night before when Hope called him. He lighted a cigar and opened his book at the place he had marked and saw before him Hope's face, as it had been in the dim light when he told her that Mrs. Bailey's boy had crossed the line safely. He saw her brown eyes bright with tears and he saw her smile.

When he had seen her so he had experienced a most curious sensation, such a sensation as he had never known before. It had frightened him; if he had ever known fear, he had never known such fear as this. When the light of the new day had dawned his fear vanished and he believed that he had not been afraid at all, that his memory was playing him false. In the bright light of the sun he tried to analyze his emotions, to determine, if he

could, that he was a fool. He had not been able to do that.

He took up his book again and again he saw Hope's face. This time it was set in firm lines; she was calm, matter-of-fact, practical; she was putting an ice-pack on the boy's head with the deftness and coolness of an experienced nurse. All night long she had worked, with no sign of emotion, as Florence Mills would work; she had hardly spoken at all, she had asked no questions about the boy's progress, she had waited until he told her, and then and not till then tears had come in her eyes.

He saw the physical woman; he shut his eyes and, alone in his room, he saw her as he had never thought of her before, tall, broad shouldered, deep-chested, strong, perfect in health, the ideal type for motherhood. He saw the beauty of her, the warmth of her skin, the luster of her brown hair, her mouth that hovered between firmness and sweetness, the light that was in her big brown eyes. He heard her voice soft and low,—a wonderfully pleasant, soothing voice and yet a voice that had gaiety and light-heartedness in it. He thought of her mind, which was the woman herself, gentle, straightforward, pure, keen of intellect, sound of judgment, kind, generous, deep and honest in her affections.

She was very like her mother, most like her of the mother's daughters, and the mother was such a woman as he would have chosen for his mother if he could have chosen. If, in all his life, he had known love for a woman he had known it for Mrs. Lee.

Ben did not know what love was; such love as he had for Mrs. Lee was only regard and respect and admiration, it was a poor excuse for love. He did not realize that, he thought nothing about it. He had never thought of loving the woman who would be the mother of the sons

he longed for; she had been an impersonal creature, an indefinite woman serving a purpose. He had thought of his sons and he had not thought of their mother except as her mind and her body should be passed on to them.

And the woman, fit to be the mother of such sons as his must be, could never be the mother of his sons, for he could not ask such a woman to bear him sons when he did not know what manner of men his sons might be. For the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children even to the third and fourth generation. He was of the second generation, perhaps of the third or fourth, and, if he had sons generations would follow after him. Neither could he, a bastard, offer himself to a good woman, a woman of breeding, of family, of fine susceptibilities; nor, if there were no curse in him, could he be the father of sons to whom he must confess that they were the sons of a bastard.

Back in the dark room with Hope, at Mrs. Bailey's, he had known, and he had never known before, that if all were well with him she would be the woman above all others whom he would choose to be the mother of his sons.

Alone in his room he thought of Austen, his dearest friend, the man who was more to him than a brother. Hope was very like Austen, she was as much like him as a woman may be like a man, and if she were the mother of his sons, then perhaps he would have a son who would be very like Austen.

The knowledge had come upon him suddenly, the knowledge that she was, to him, the perfect woman, that she would be the perfect wife and mother. He had been much with her in the days before, in Timothy Higgins's room and out of it, but never in those days, or in the days before it, had he thought of her except

as a little girl who was his friend. The knowledge had come that night, suddenly and with no warning.

Then when the boy had passed out of the shadow of death and he had told her that all was well, she had smiled and there had been tears in her eyes. When he had seen her so he had believed for an instant that her thoughts were all of the boy, but as he looked at her he had seen more than the smile on her lips, he had seen through her tears and deep into her eyes and he had been frightened, for her thoughts had not been all of the boy, but of him, too.

He had not understood, he had not reasoned or attempted to analyze what he saw, but a cold, clammy fear had clutched his heart. Hope was thinking of him, as she had never thought of him before, as she had never believed that she could think of him. In that instant their old relationship of old man and little girl had fallen in ruins, they were big brother and little sister no more. What had come to take the place of that relationship he did not know, but he was afraid.

When he had slept and had gone out into the sunshine of the new day his fear had vanished. What he had seen had been only in his own brain, an hallucination, a myth made real by the dim light of the room and the tension of the moment, a deception brought about by her emotion, her belief and her joy for the boy's safety.

But, though his fear was gone and his mind clear, a heavy, depressing weight had descended upon him. He did not know what it was, he did not even know what had put it there, but he could not shake it off.

It was not until he was alone, on the evening of the third day, that he thought, not of some indefinite, impersonal, vague woman who might be the mother of his sons, but of the one woman whom, if all were well with

him, he would choose for his wife. Even then he knew nothing of love, he did not think of it or breathe the word, for he was thinking of Hope. For her to love him would be impossible, for him to love her would be to insult her.

And yet he thought of her as he had seen her when she smiled at him through her tears. Her face was clear before him, it remained clear and he could not drive it away. He closed his eyes and it was clearer still. He lay deep in his chair, motionless, his book on his knees, his arms spread out on the arms of the chair, his eyes shut. He remained so minute after minute, gazing at the face and dreaming of what might be if all were well for him.

Then suddenly he sat up and his lips curled, not into a smile but into the curious shape of sadness. His lips moved, he spoke to himself, silently. "No, Hope, you must never think of that. I know you never have thought of it and never will, but you must n't, ever; you must n't—ever. You're a little girl and I'm an old man. There are so many things that you do not understand and must never understand. You must go your way, happy and serene, receiving your happiness as the Lord intends you shall, and I must go mine. You must do your work in the world and I must do mine. You and I are very unlike, we are as far apart as the poles, and we shall always be so; we should never even have been friends if you and yours had not been kind and charitable to me." Yet even then he was speaking to what Hope represented and not to Hope herself.

Ben went on and on, one thought tumbling over the other and none of them making sense. Finally he picked up his book and read. The thing was settled, for ever and ever. It never entered his head that at that very

moment he might be in love with Hope, much less that Hope loved him or ever could love him. His whole reverie was a mass of ridiculous contradictions and confused absurdities. If ever there was a queer man, Ben was he. His thoughts and his emotions followed no beaten path. The third and fourth generation had become an obsession with him, dominating him. He called himself an old man when he thought of Hope, and yet he was hardly thirty-four; he had always thought of her as a child and now she was certainly not a child.

He had never loved a woman, he had never thought of love; he had never desired to love or to be loved; he had indirectly or subconsciously denied himself, academically, the right to love. Such love as he had known had been for men and that sort of love is very different from the love a man has for a woman. He had no conception of the feelings Bull and Thrall had for women, his feeling had been exactly the opposite of theirs.

He did not love now, he did not love Hope, he would never love her; and she could never love him, she must never love him.

All he knew of the whole thing was that he was curiously depressed and sad, as he had never been before, and that he was borne down by some load that he did not understand.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE nights later, on Saturday, when Ben returned to his house he found a message to telephone Miss Hope Lee.

"Are you going to Austen's to supper to-morrow?" she asked when he called her. Ben said that he was and Hope said that she was going too, and would Ben please bring her home? Ben said that of course he would.

Austen, his family increased by another daughter, had moved to Hopedale, in the country, two years before. His house was near the Lanning Golf Club, where Ben and Austen played golf. Elinor said that that was why they had chosen the house.

He played with Austen that afternoon and went home with him. Hope was already there. She was sitting on the piazza at a table, looking at a big book with Mary Lee, who had reached the picture age. She looked up at Ben with the same sweet, unconscious smile that Ben had known ever since he had known her.

"Hello," she said, to both men. "Who won?"

"We both got licked," Austen said.

Ben had sat down and was watching her and there was joy in his heart, for the woman who had smiled through her tears in Mrs. Bailey's front room was gone. The thing which he had seen, deep down in her eyes, on her lips, the thing which had frightened him, was gone.

Hope was as she had always been, before that night, a little girl who was his friend. She liked him just as she liked her big brothers; she had the same faith in him and the same affection for him that she had for her brothers, but in a less degree, for they were bound to her by ties of blood, he only by long companionship.

He had been frightened and had not understood; his fear had disappeared and he had felt sad and depressed and he had not understood. Now he was happy; the intangible load that had been bearing him down had been removed and still he did not understand.

The man was quite as queer as the boy had been.

The evening at Austen's passed as many before it had passed. Ben played with the children, all of whom except the youngest were allowed to sit up to supper. Only Austen, junior, who was eight, was allowed to do that ordinarily. Sunday evening was, accordingly, a very special occasion.

When the children were safely in bed, a condition achieved only after much excitement, their elders enjoyed the peace and quiet of the warm May evening on the piazza.

At ten o'clock Ben and Hope said good night, got into Ben's car, and started for Alden. When they were on the highroad and well out of hearing of the two whom they had left Hope said:

"Is n't Elinor wonderful?"

Elinor *was* wonderful, even Ben knew that. He had for a long time thought of her as an insignificant little woman, both physically and mentally, but recent years had changed that. She had not increased in stature, of course, and yet she was a very substantial woman, a very ample, motherly sort of woman, though no one could possibly say that she had grown fat. Perhaps

her motherhood, the big children about her, and the dignity of her position made her more impressive than she had been in her youth. Mentally she had expanded remarkably; or, better, perhaps her real strength of character, which had lain dormant, had come out where it could be seen. If marriage and many children do not bring out whatever may be in a woman, what will? Austen had undoubtedly always known that behind her meekness, her trace of bashfulness, and her great modesty was a very able and level-headed young lady. Certainly she performed her duties with great ability, tact, and charm.

"She is wonderful," Ben said. "I used to think that she was an insignificant little thing without much brains. I never suspected that Austen was really in love with her until almost the day he told me they were going to be married. Now, when I see her, and know her so well, I wonder I could ever have been as blind as I was when I first knew her." Ben almost sighed. "But, then, you know, Hope, I always have been blind in lots of ways."

"Silly!" Hope said. "Anyway, you're not blind any more: when any one admits he's blind, then he isn't."

Ben laughed. "I wonder if that is so."

"Of course it's so; and I'll tell you something else that is so. It's a perfectly wonderful night and it would be perfectly sweet of you if you'd turn off to the river and go home that way. That is, of course, if you're not in a hurry or going anywhere."

"I'm not in a hurry and I'm going home and to bed when I've delivered you to your parents."

"I do like warm weather—warm, not hot," Hope said. "I always feel young again when it comes after a long, cold winter."

"Young again! So you've been old, have you, all winter and kept it a secret from every one?"

Ben looked at her. She, in the seat beside him, was just where Jean Vance had been not many nights before, and that night had been warm. Hope was very different from Jean Vance; her clothes were very, very different. A pang of regret for what had happened on that other night swept over Ben. He was not proud of what he had done.

"Age is relative," Hope said wisely. "I feel terribly grown up in the winter and absolutely childish in the spring."

"You don't say! you don't say! I had n't supposed that you—"

Ben never finished that sentence.

Paddy Hogan ran a hack. He had for some years succeeded in doing the seemingly impossible when he had extracted an appreciable degree of motion out of his antiquated cab-horse. That task had tried Paddy Hogan's soul and temper, and had snapped his strength. Under the singing lash of progress Paddy had swapped his horse and ramshackle vehicle for a flivver, much to the disturbance of his horde of savings, and he then immediately discovered that he could produce at least three times as many passenger miles by simply wriggling his toes a bit against an accelerator as he could do before with violent girations of his whole body and arms. Accordingly, Paddy's spirit soared upward, like a soul released from bondage.

Very shortly after Paddy became possessed of his self-propelled vehicle he could drive it with a speed rights of others, was nothing less than spectacular. that, considering the irregularity of the track and the

Paddy knew every inch of highway, every turning, every hole in the road for miles about the Hopedale Station, and he knew them in the dark quite as well as in the daytime. Familiarity bred contempt in Paddy as it does in other human beings, and as the days passed he became so much a part of his machine that he really believed that the machine itself had absorbed some of his own super-intelligence. Perhaps, too, Paddy was a fatalist.

At any rate, after Paddy had been going steady for twelve or fourteen hours he was ready to take anything for granted,—one thing being that he could n't possibly find trouble after ten o'clock at night, when the streets were deserted and the way virtually sure to be clear.

All of this might have been forgiven Paddy if his little car had had lights which had really thrown out a warning or if he had used his horn at the proper time or even if he had not had the unfortunate habit of dreaming while at the wheel at night.

So it was unheralded that Paddy came from behind the garden wall of A. Augustus Warren's place and, turning at a dizzy pace, crashed into the slowly moving car that contained Ben and Hope. He could never explain how it happened, he had a dim recollection of seeing lights of some sort, but he was pretty sure he had heard no warning horn. No, he had n't been drinking, he'd swear to that.

There was no question of the speed at which Paddy had been driving; the wreck of the two cars was proof enough of that. Paddy made a swell job of it while he was at it, both as to machines and individuals. There was a tearing of metal and wood, a crashing of glass, the thud of heavy masses coming against curbs and trees, and then silence. There was not a cry, not a groan; it was as though all life, human and mechanical, had on

the instant flown away. Even the water dripping from a broken radiator made no sound.

Hope's eyes were open. At first she thought that the room was very warm and that she had far too many bedclothes over her; she was quite sure that she had opened all the windows, but she could n't remember about the bedclothes. Of course it would be easy enough to take them off and she set about doing it, but before she could do anything she had to find her hands and somehow her hands had disappeared. She did n't quite understand about that: she had always before been able to find them when she wanted them.

But it was n't really important except that it was getting more and more difficult to breathe because of the weight of the blankets. She thought that perhaps she could kick them off, but curiously enough she could n't move her legs. She was quite sure that she knew where they were, but for some reason they would n't move. They were tied down, tied to something; she could n't quite tell how they were tied, but she could feel the ropes or straps or whatever it was that was holding them.

Annoying as that sensation of suffocation was, it could n't be anything very serious, there in her own bed; it certainly was n't worth worrying about, she was just very sleepy, probably it was all a dream. She would shut her eyes and really go to sleep. She did shut them, but they were no sooner shut than she began to hear things.

No one was speaking, she was quite sure of that, and yet it sounded like voices, as though some one was saying, "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah," interminably, with the "hurs" very low and the "rahs" accented a little, but all run together and indistinct. She did n't know how long

that kept up, but it was a long time before something else made her forget it.

Suddenly there was a small sharp pain somewhere about her, she was n't sure whether it was in her body or in her arm, and it did n't hurt very much. She hoped that it was in her arm, though really it did n't make much difference where it was, it was such a small pain.

Then some one lighted a lamp, or at any rate there was a light, she could feel it shining through her eyelids. She opened her eyes to see what it was all about and saw Ben. Of course everything was all right if Ben was there, even if there was something queer about his being there. But it was Ben, she was sure of that: he had his arm around her and was holding her.

She could n't understand about Ben's face, she could see only part of it for some of it was dark, but the part she could see was queer. Was it upside down? She was thinking about that and wondering whether she should speak to him when some one lifted those terribly heavy blankets and she could breathe again. Then she felt Ben holding her: she knew it was Ben, though she could not see him. The light had gone out, too, and she was very comfortable. Ben was walking with her. It was all too funny for words, a silly dream, especially the idea that she was lying in a big touring-car with Ben holding her.

She heard Ben talking, though she was sure it was her imagination, part of the dream. She heard Ben say something about telephoning and something about Dr. Slade. She wondered what Dr. Slade had to do with all this, although of course he was a great friend of the family and of Ben's. He could n't be in the house at that time of night, but then neither could a touring-car, and she could feel the car moving, it seemed to be

going very fast. There was a racket going on, too, though she could n't tell just what it was all about unless it was the horn. Come to think of it, that was exactly what it was, the horn, going pretty nearly all the time.

Hope thought of stories she had read, of Mississippi boats in the old days, with their safety valves tied down. That's exactly what had happened here, except that they had made a mistake and tied down the whistle instead of the safety valve. Whistle, horn—horn, whistle—what absolute nonsense! There was something wrong somewhere, something decidedly wrong, but she was too tired to find out what it was. She would n't try, she'd just lie still in Ben's arms, and go to sleep.

The next thing Hope remembered was seeing Ben again. He was all in white, and a lot of other people were there with him and they were all in white, too. That meant the operating-room; Hope knew that well enough, but she could n't imagine why she was there. She wondered who was to be operated on.

She was watching Ben, she could see him clearly enough; why not ask him?

"Ben, Ben." She *had* spoken to him, had n't she? She was sure she had, but he did n't seem to hear her. Instead of answering her his face began to twist into queer shapes and to jump about, and then it went up and up, farther and farther from her, till it was on the ceiling. It stayed there only an instant and then faded slowly away.

She heard singing, very low and growing lower and lower, till that, too, died away in the far distance.

The sun was shining into Hope's room. She was sitting in a very comfortable chair and the morning papers were in her lap. Beside her on a table was a pile of

mail which she had just read. The breakfast things had been taken away a few minutes before. In two or three days she could get up and have breakfast with the family and she was very glad of that, for she hated being petted this way; it had been all right at first, when she had felt so weak, but now it was a nuisance and very foolish for a big strong woman to be treated like a baby. She must be all well again because before long the nurse would dress her and she would go downstairs to lunch and afterward she would take a drive for an hour. She never had been very sick,—if it could be called sickness at all, two broken ribs and a banged-up arm being almost all the damage. There had been a few small cuts and a few big bruises, but they were trivial. The shock had been more or less serious, and there had been some fever for a while, but there had never been any danger and she had recovered very rapidly.

Poor Ben had had a lot harder time than she had, even if he had n't really been hurt at all. His cuts had healed quickly and his arm was well already and never had been very bad, but Hope was worried about his head. The blow that had knocked him out might be serious even if every one said it was n't.

Hope was not satisfied about his head, for there was surely something wrong with Ben. She knew him like a book learned by heart; she knew every atom of him, every thought; she knew what his every movement meant, what every expression of his face meant, what every glance of his eye meant, and—there was the trouble. All these things had been true of the old Ben, they were mostly true now, but now there was something new hidden away inside him that Hope did n't understand at all.

It seemed to her that she had noticed it the time he

came to her bedside the morning after the accident, though she was in no condition to notice anything very much. He had hovered around the room for the first two or three days, not doing anything and hardly saying anything at all, for she was Dr. Slade's patient and Ben was not supposed to interfere. He had stood beside her bed and sat beside her bed, looking—just how had he looked? Was it silly? foolish? She could n't think of any better word to describe it, except imbecile, and that was an entirely too unpleasant term.

Later, as the days passed and her mind cleared and her brain began to work with its usual keenness, she realized more and more that something was wrong with Ben, and she was worried.

She picked up the paper and read, but that troublesome thought was always running on ahead of the print and she had to go back and read things over before she understood at all what she was reading. That was the condition of affairs when Dr. Slade came to make his daily call.

Dr. Slade was as much like Ben Thorpe as black is like white, for all they were both by way of being eminent surgeons. Slade was a jovial man who liked company and loved to chat, who liked to gossip pleasantly, and tell funny stories and hear them; and he liked to break the monotony of professional routine by sitting down and being comfortable when he had the chance. He was well aware that Hope had no further use for him so far as her physical condition was concerned, but he could n't resist dropping in to see her on his way to the hospital. He was very fond of all the Lees and especially of her; he had brought her into the world in the first place and had taken care of her ever since.

"Good morning, young lady," he said, and immediately

set out to discover whether the flowers on the table had any appreciable odor. This point determined, he examined for the twentieth time the photographs on the mantelpiece. Then he sat down and said:

"How are things this morning?"

"I'm entirely well," said Hope.

"No soreness?"

"Just the slightest little bit in my arm."

"Quite to be expected. It will wear off; you'll forget all about it presently."

"So you admit that I am cured?"

"I am delighted to admit it."

"And that I am quite strong again?"

"H'm," said Dr. Slade, "that sounds as though you were leading up to something."

"I am."

"Then till I know what it is, you are far from well."

"Am I well enough to be told what's the matter with Ben?"

"The matter with Ben?"

"Yes, the matter with Ben! There's no use in your trying to make believe there is nothing the matter, because there is and I want to know what it is."

"H'm," said Dr. Slade, and he put the ends of his fingers together and pressed them hard and looked over them at Hope.

"You are right," he said, "there is something the matter with Ben, there certainly is, but it's nothing that medicine or the knife can help in any way. It is not serious; I might say that it is absolutely negligible, something to laugh at. In any other man it might be passed over with nothing more than a little—shall we call it, h'm, pity or sympathy?—but with him I am very much afraid that the only thing to do is to laugh. My only

regret is that he is going to get over it and spoil the joke."

Hope tried to laugh and could n't. She did n't like to have even Dr. Slade, his bosom friend, make fun of Ben; and, besides, there was something wrong with Ben, something that perhaps she could see and no one else could. Very seriously Hope asked:

"Won't you tell me what it is?"

"I am here in my professional capacity and I am not at all sure that the ethics of that profession would, so to speak, look favorably on my giving away my fellow-worker." Dr. Slade was grinning.

"Please don't tease me."

"Impossible," he exclaimed. Then he had a brilliant idea. "Perhaps we could look upon it as necessary for the peace of mind of my patient, and that that peace of mind is necessary for her complete recovery."

"That is a very good way to look at it."


"Then I'll take the chance and tell you." Dr. Slade hesitated a moment, as though considering how to begin. Then he said: "You have heard, of course, how, when Ben recovered consciousness after the accident, he pried you loose from the wreckage—no small task, incidentally—and got you into the automobile that happened to come along. All of that has really nothing to do with the point at issue.

"When you reached the hospital the orderlies were waiting at the door with a stretcher, but it was with difficulty that they could prevent Ben carrying you in his arms. He finally realized that the stretcher was best and you traveled to the examination room on it and later to the operating-room in the conventional way. I admit that there was the possibility of internal injuries, those things can't be discovered in ten minutes,

but very soon we were quite sure that that possibility was extremely remote. The breakages that we did discover, while unfortunate, were not serious; looked at broadly, and considering what might have happened, they were almost insignificant. We were also quite sure that there was nothing physically wrong with Ben.

"Imagine, therefore, our surprise and consternation when we saw him acting like a crazy man. I have seen him, perhaps a thousand times, perform operations of the most serious character, many of them so serious that except for his masterly skill the patient would have stood no chance at all. It is generally supposed and perhaps it is true, that an operation is no more trying to a surgeon than shoeing a horse is to a blacksmith. Certainly that has always been true of Ben. I, we, many of us, have watched to discover some sign of nerves in him, or, failing that, some sign of nervousness, and we have looked in vain. He was as cold-blooded as a machine; people have gone so far as to insist that he was purely and entirely a scientist, that he had no interest whatever in the humane side of his profession, that he was entirely without sentiment or heart. You and I and lots of others know that that is not so, outside of the operating-room at least.

"On the other hand, Miss Lee, if I may digress, picture to yourself the other extreme. Take, for instance, the fussy, emotional, almost hysterical young woman, a young mother, nervous, excited, worried, distracted, her mind wandering hither and yon, asking questions and making herself ridiculous and being a nuisance, all because her first-born is in the hospital having his tonsils out. You undoubtedly know the type well, and can fully appreciate our alarm when your friend suddenly trans-



formed himself from Dr. Thorpe to something closely, very closely indeed, resembling that young woman.

"There is no need for me to describe the examination and the setting of the bones, or rather Ben's behavior while it was going on. It will be sufficient for me to tell you that he followed you from the operating-room, sank into a chair in the corridor outside your room, put his face in his hands, and sobbed as though his heart would break. We stood about, afraid to do or say anything and afraid not to. Finally we led him away and ultimately got him to bed, where the nurses watched him all night, hovering between pity and alarm. The next morning he arose apparently perfectly well, but with a most curious expression in his eyes.

"For three days he hovered about your room; I don't think he was more than fifty feet away from it more than half an hour at a time during those three days. He'd come into my office and sit down, get up, sit down, get up, walk around a bit, and go out. A little while later he'd come back and do it all over. He'd look at me, say something foolish about nothing at all, and then say, just as casually as he could, 'She's all right, Arthur? She's—er—nothing has—er?' At first I patted him on the back and told him everything was going finely, but after the 'steenth time I told him if he didn't get out and stay out I'd go upstairs and murder you and have it over with. Out he'd go, and back he'd come an hour later to see if there had been any developments in the case.

"Eventually he suddenly realized that you were a very ordinary, uninteresting patient and that your recovery was as sure as death and taxes, and he soon became his old self, except that there was an expression in his eyes that had not been there before. It resembled, I

should say, the expression of a small boy whose conscience is not clear, and who is expecting momentarily to be—I believe the term is ‘caught with the goods.’

“Certainly, my dear young lady, Dr. Thorpe has something weighing heavily upon him, he is worried, and I don’t blame him. It may mean that the end of his career is approaching. He lost his nerve, lost it completely, over an ordinary, uninteresting, commonplace, simple case. I must go. Good-by.”

Dr. Slade walked to the door and stood holding the knob. He chuckled.

“Doctor Thorpe is operating this morning,” he said. “I forgot to tell you that,—several cases, I understand, quite difficult ones.” Then the door closed again, the doctor chuckled again, and he went downstairs. He met Mrs. Lee in the hall below and told her that Hope was to all intents and purposes well, and went out and drove away, still chuckling.

Hope had sat quietly while she listened to Dr. Slade. Her eyes had rested upon him, he had hardly looked at her at all, but had wandered about looking at everything in the room but her.

When he was gone her eyes remained for a moment on the doorway through which he had taken his departure; then they fell to her hands in her lap; then they went out of doors through the open window to the house across the street, and then over it to the sky, and stayed there, a long, long time. During that time her cheeks, which had been a little pale, took on a rosy tint, which grew redder and redder and spread till it covered almost her whole face and her throat, even back to her neck where her hair curled close, below her ears.

Her lips moved, as though she were saying a word to

herself, over and over again. Then she laughed, just loud enough so that she could have been heard across the room. Suddenly her laughter stopped short and the color rushed over her face again, fiery red, much redder than it had been before.

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CHAPTER XVII

DURING the time in which Hope was recovering from her accident, Ben had a dirty job to do. Thaddius Octavius Thrall, the genius, whose failing was women, got into trouble. He was an able lawyer and an experienced man of the world; Charley Bull had said to Ben that Thrall would keep out of trouble. But Thrall had n't.

For a long time he had kept out of trouble; he had watched his step carefully and his foot had not gotten stuck in the mud. As a matter of fact, he had not been very much afraid of trouble; he was a more or less obscure individual and his getting into trouble would not excite any great public interest. He was a bachelor without kith or kin in Alden or near it and any trouble a woman could make for him she was welcome to make. She could n't get any money out of him—he took good care of that—and there was n't anything else for her to get.

Then suddenly there was something else for her to get. Thrall's progress at the law had been rapid, but even so he had remained in natural obscurity for the first five years he had been in Alden; lawyers are not made in a day, even if they are geniuses and have been through the Harvard Law School. During those five years Thrall had worked his way upward slowly and then had suddenly burst into prominence. Coincidentally he had dis-

covered that he knew a great many fine men, that he was received in a great many delightful homes, and that he had something to lose besides money. That knowledge abated no wit his fondness for women, but for two or three years he was very circumspect, finding his diversion almost entirely with ladies of position and the best of characters.

Men of genius have weaknesses and Thrall had his; history and common gossip make it pretty clear that at least many men of strong mentality and great energy have a fondness for a type of femininity that is likely to have greater charm than intellectuality, to be entertaining rather than moral, to be vivacious rather than virtuous.

Ben and Thrall, ordinarily, did not see very much of each other; their professions kept them in different circles. Thrall cared nothing for sports and Ben cared much for them; Thrall liked social affairs, whereas Ben hated them. But their friendship was on too firm a foundation to wither away; they made a point of dining together at least once a month, and, belonging to the same club, they sometimes met at lunch.

As luck would have it, Ben saw Thrall half a dozen times within two weeks and he suspected that Thrall had something on his mind. At first it was the dimmest suspicion; during those two weeks it really never became much more than that, for Thrall always hid his emotions well, whatever they might be. The ability to do that was undoubtedly part of his stock in trade, perhaps he had practised it as part of his profession. Nevertheless, small as the signs were, Ben suspected that something was wrong. There was about Thrall just a trace of nervousness and a suggestion of absent-mindedness, as though his thoughts were on something other than the matter at hand.

Finally Ben, fishing around for an opening, asked Thrall if he were well.

"Perfectly well," Thrall said. "Why? don't I look so?"

"Probably it is only my imagination," Ben answered. "I thought you looked a bit run down, as though a little less work and a bit more play would do you good."

"I'll admit that much. I am tired, but that's all. I'm going away shortly."

Then, and not till then did Ben's suspicions become strong, a glance from Thrall made them so. Thrall's health might be all right—it probably was—but there was something wrong somewhere, there had been a flash of ashamed admission in Thrall's eyes. Ben rushed in.

"If you're sound physically, old man, what's the other trouble?"

Thrall laughed and he laughed heartily. "To think," he said, "after all these years of sound advice from you, more than advice—pleading, lecturing, admonition—which I have done my best to follow—"


"The devil you have!" Ben broke in.

"You don't know how hard I've tried—lately. I made up my mind that you were right,—half right anyway,—and I did my darnedest to obey orders. I succeeded pretty well for a while, a couple of years; I was getting proud of myself and I was going to tell you about it so that you'd be proud of me and then I fell." He looked at Ben whimsically. "Of course I was a damn-fool, but she was a peach, she was; there's no question about that."

"And now your foot is stuck in the mud?"

"I suppose you might call it that. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether it's beauty in distress or black-mail."

"Bad as that, is it, Thad?"



"Yes, it's as bad as that."

"Can't you find out which it is? It makes quite a difference to you, does n't it?"

"Of course it does. I suppose time will tell."

"You're a lawyer, you ought to be able to take care of it if it's blackmail."

"Maybe. I was n't afraid of that sort of thing once. I am now."

"You mean the dirty publicity part of it if you refuse to pay up? What can she do?—take you into court?"

"She can't, but her husband can."

Ben said nothing to that, but he winced, and Thrall saw it. He knew that that was for Ben the one unforgivable sin.

"It is n't as bad as it sounds, Ben, so far as my deeds are concerned," Thrall said. "I'll tell you the story if you'll let me. I can't let you think I'm as low as that sounds. One night four months ago I worked late at the office, with nothing to eat. I quit around eleven and went to a restaurant for a bite, alone. I ran into a party of men and women and one of the men, the only one of the crowd I knew, asked me to join them and I did. I knew the man well; he was a pretty decent chap and his friends seemed to be perfectly respectable people, all of them, so far as I could see. They had been to the theater, I think; anyway, we ate a good deal, we were there till about twelve or a little after.

"I met the woman there. She was awfully good to look at and while the ultra-ultras would n't call her a lady perhaps, she knew how to talk and how to behave very well. I sat next to her and talked mostly to her, and there's no use denying it, I liked her; she was handsome as the devil and witty. I took her home—I happened to have my car downtown—and she asked me to come in. She lived alone, in an apartment up-town.

There's no use in dragging the tale out; she told me that she was a widow and in business, she seemed to be a pleasant, square decent woman. Of course you won't admit that she could possibly be decent and I guess you're right, but a widow of thirty-five may be forgiven much. Now her husband has turned up and—well—naturally, he has her with the goods."

"She lied to you, of course, about being a widow?"

"Yes, but she says that her husband was no good, left her stranded years ago, and she thought that he was dead; she had what she supposed was proof of that. She assumes the position of an innocent woman—that is, innocent so far as blackmail is concerned—and blames her husband. She says she only wants me to take care of her; her husband won't or can't. He's a bad actor."

"You have taken care of her, at least to some extent, I suppose?"

"No, I have n't. She never asked for anything, never even hinted at it."

"You say she assumes the position of not being a party to—to blood-money. Do you think she is honest about it?"

"No, I don't. I think the whole thing is a frame-up. Yet sure as I am of it, I can hardly convince myself that she's crooked; that sort of thing seems entirely foreign to her character."

"Her condition, of course, can be discovered. What does the husband want?—some sort of settlement to forget the whole thing?"

"Yes, he wants ten thousand dollars."

"Modest, is n't he? Do you know whether or not she told people generally that she was a widow?"

"Yes, she has. If I were absolutely sure the woman is honest, I'd give her money,—not that much, but something,—but I have a feeling she is n't."

"You ought to know her pretty well, I should think."

"Who ever knows that kind of woman well?"

"Thad, to think of that from you! Are you beginning to see the light? Do you understand at last that there are two sorts of women in this world who are safe?—those who are all good and those who are all bad, frankly and professionally bad. Lord knows I don't want to rub it in now, when things are unpleasant, but I told you that years ago, in college, when I was a kid; I knew it then as well as I know it now. If I get you out of this mess, will you keep that great truth firmly fixed in that brilliant head of yours! promise never to forget it as long as you live? I don't mean to ask you to promise to act accordingly; that would n't be square, it would be too much for any man to promise, but will you promise to try like hell?"

Thrall nodded. "I've had my lesson, Ben. Perhaps at the moment I'm the sick devil who would be a monk, but I don't think so. It's a poor business at best, and I've got too much to lose. I don't want decent men and women to—to—but you understand."

"Yes, I understand. You see the practical side of it, you old rascal; it's a matter of ethics rather than of morals. Never mind, I'm narrow-minded and a preacher. Who is the lady and where does she live?"

"Her name is Lydia Meade and she lives at four thousand Orchard Street, Apartment Number Fourteen. But what on earth can you do—to straighten things out?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Her husband is there, is he?"

"Yes, I suppose so; he's around somewhere, but why are you—?"

"Blackmail, especially this kind, never appealed to me, it sort of riles me; when it comes near home it's especially distasteful. If this husband is what he appears

to be, he has a history that won't bear investigation. Gibb of the detective bureau is a friend of mine; so is Gray, the district attorney. I've been able to do 'em favors on occasion; you know I go into all sorts of queer places that you high-toned civil or semi-civil lawyers don't know anything about. Maybe they 'll do something for me if I need help."

"And you mean to say you're willing to mix up in all this filth just to—"

Ben stopped him. "Anyway, don't do anything till you hear from me. It will be in a day or two."

Late that afternoon Ben rang the bell of apartment Number 14 at 4000 Orchard Street. In the meantime he had had a chat with Inspector Gibb and the inspector had promised aid if it were needed and the case were within even a liberal interpretation of the law.

The door of the apartment was opened promptly and quite as promptly Ben passed through it. There was no reason for being formal in such matters with women like Mrs. Meade. Once inside, he could be quite as formal as he pleased.

It was quite dark in the small hall, the only light coming through a near-by door.

"Is Mrs. Meade at home?"

"Yes."

"May I see her?"

"What about?" The woman's words and her voice were just a shade away from calmness.

"I'll explain that to Mrs. Meade, if I may."

"I'm Mrs. Meade."

"Then may I talk with you?"

Ben's eyes were becoming used to the low light, and he could see the woman's face dimly. She seemed ill at ease and in no pleasant humor.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"I am a friend of Mr. Thrall's. You know Mr. Thrall very well, don't you?"

"Yes." It sounded a little defiant.

There was more light in the room into which Ben had walked and into which the woman had followed him. Ben looked at the woman closely; his first sensation was surprise that even one so susceptible to beauty as Thrall could have been deceived as to the real character of the woman, it seemed to Ben to be clearly written on her face. It was of course quite possible that she did not appear now, to him, as she had appeared to Thrall in the beginning; a woman's face may change greatly with the changes of her environment and mental condition. Ben made due allowance for Thrall on that point.

His second impression was that the woman had not told Thrall the truth.

He stood watching her, with more or less design. He was quite willing that she should begin the conversation. He waited only a moment or two for her to do that, but during that time he had a third and this time a very distinct and strong impression.

"May I sit down?" he asked.

The woman gave him permission by sitting down herself, and Ben was glad that she chose a chair which faced the window so that the light fell full on her face.

"I quite appreciate that I have come on a very delicate mission," he said.

"Have you—just why have you come? I don't think I quite understand."

"Mr. Thrall tells me that your husband, whom you thought dead and for whom you had no regrets, has suddenly reappeared. I take it that he is interfering with your—your—what shall we call it—friendship?—with Mr. Thrall."

"I cannot prevent my husband doing whatever he chooses."

"Naturally. It is not to be expected that you could have any control over such a man as I understand him to be. You do not, I understand, approve of what he is doing, or attempting to do?"

"Of course not."

"You do not blame Mr. Thrall in any way; you would do anything you could to help him out of what we may call an annoying situation, a situation that is annoying because of your own situation."

"No, I don't blame Mr. Thrall for anything. It's just tough luck all round, that's all."

"Except for your husband, of course. He expects to, hopes to benefit greatly."

"I told you that I can't prevent my husband doing what he likes. I'm his wife; I suppose he has some rights."

"I think that is a question, but it is a question of law and we won't discuss it. I imagine the last thing any one wants,—you or your husband and even Mr. Thrall,—is to have the law brought into it. Publicity would be most unwelcome to all concerned, would it not?"

"Will you tell me who you are and just why you have come here?"

"I have come primarily as a friend of Mr. Thrall's, and because I hate blackmail. When I heard the supposed facts of the case they sounded very fishy to me; it was all too mechanical, everything happened as though it had been arranged. Your meeting Mr. Thrall was an accident, of course, but after that—" Ben shrugged his shoulders.

The woman evidently was struggling to control her temper. Even when he accused her, point-blank, of being a party to the blackmailing scheme, she knew that it

would be dangerous to resent his statement; she was afraid of what she might say if she began to talk.

Ben waited, watching her closely, but she said nothing. Suddenly Ben smiled and in a moment he said: "I have n't been mixed up in a blackmailing case for years, I don't know much about them, but they are amusing. Do you know, Mrs. Meade, I had n't the faintest idea when I came here that I should find anything amusing? It's an enormous relief."

She was able to answer that statement. "I don't see anything amusing about it. Do you think I like it any better than Mr. Thrall? Who's the greatest sufferer, him or me?"

"I hope neither of you is going to suffer very much. I forgot to tell you that I am a doctor; I really came here in that capacity."

The woman started and her expression changed just a little. Ben had seen nothing about her to indicate that she had told Thrall the truth, but that was weak negative evidence at best; now he was very sure that she had lied.

"Are you willing to prove that you have told Mr. Thrall the truth?" he asked.

The woman's eyes half closed, color came into her face, her fingers moved nervously along the arm of the chair. She was thinking hard, but she could not think clearly. She knew the weakness of her case, she had known from the beginning that if Thrall did not pay immediately he would not pay at all. She had told him her story three weeks before, her "husband" had "returned" a week after and had gone straight to Thrall and had not accomplished anything.

What answer she would have made to Ben, if there had not been an interruption, no one will ever know. The interruption came in the form of a man who opened the outside door and walked into the room. A more un-

attractive individual could not have been imagined. He was dressed rather well, otherwise he had nothing whatever to commend him. He was short, slim and rat-faced, his eyes were small, sharp and shifty; if ever crookedness and lack of any merit whatsoever were written on a man's face, they were written on his.

Neither had he, apparently, any courage or ease of manner. He saw the huge form of Ben and stood staring at him, until his eyes sought the woman's, questioningly.

Finally the little man said, "Well?"

"Is this your husband?" Ben asked the woman.

The woman did not answer, but the man did. "What's that to you? Who are you?" He made a poor effort at something half-way between indifference and bravado.

"It's nothing in the world to me who you are," Ben said. "Neither is it anything to you who I am. I was simply curious to know whether or not Mrs. Meade had ever really married you, and if she had why in God's name she did it. You don't look like her sort, you're not in her class by miles."

"What's the game?" the little man demanded.

Ben rose and walked across the small room to him; side by side they were like a mastiff and a small terrier. Ben's great paw fell on the man's shoulder and gripped it.

"You are the saddest-looking blackmailer I've ever seen," he said, and then he turned to the woman. "Does this live here, with you?"

Then the woman talked. "Say, what's the game? What do you think you're doing here, anyway?"

Ben smiled at her. "Can't you guess? Don't you remember me, Mrs.—er—Mrs. Meade?"

"How could I remember you? I've never seen you before."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not; it's not important. The

important thing is that a friend of mine is on the corner across the street. If I go to the window and signal to him he'll come up here and take this man, husband or not, to police headquarters and see whether he's known or wanted or anything of that sort. Of course if he is n't they'll let him go in a day or two. It's up to you whether that happens or not. Is he your husband?"

The woman was through, the game was up; she had not been enthusiastic about it from the beginning, there had been too much bluff about it.

"Have a heart!" she said.

The little man mumbled something, indistinctly.

"Keep quiet, Harry." She did n't want to make things any worse, they were bad enough as they were. The little man shrank into a chair, a poor specimen of a black-mailer.

"Is he your husband?" Ben asked again.

"No, he is n't." The poor rag in the chair said never a word.

"Have you a husband?"

The woman shook her head.

"That's straight, no nonsense?"

"No, I have n't."

"Is this man a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

Ben looked at the pathetic little thing in the chair.

"Does he live here?" he asked.

"Have a heart! have a heart!" she exclaimed.

Ben walked to the chair, took the brave blackmailer by the coat collar, and lifted him to his feet, "Get out," he said, "and don't come back. And if I ever hear of you again in Alden, God help you." The little man flew across the room and through the door, much of the impetus being supplied for him. He closed the outside door without slamming it.

Ben sat down.

"Do you mind if I smoke while we talk things over?" he asked. The woman told him to smoke all he liked and he lighted his pipe. "Well, Lizzie," he said, "it turned out to be a farce, didn't it? I told you years ago that blackmail was a dangerous game. Of course you remember me."

"I'd hardly be likely to forget you, I know you the minute I opened the door. Say, don't I have fine luck running into friends of yours?"

"I did you a good turn once, and I suppose this good turn deserves another. I'm much obliged to you for—well, call it ending this business quickly, without a scene or a fuss. I suppose you did it as a kindness to me."

Lizzie Meadows seemed pleased. "You did treat me right, back in Cambridge," she said, "and the people you sent me to treated me right, too."

"And what have you been doing since?"

What Lizzie Meadows had been doing since he was important. She did mean that she had let her hands mix up in anything cracked before Harry came along and inspired her into trying the game in Texas.

"Do you like Harry?" Ben asked.

"Forget Harry?" she said, and she said it so that Ben was forced to leave the conversation and discuss the Harry and gene influence over her, like she said him.

It was then for a while when he was a little boy, near, went over in the evening, and Harry away.

Number one, a great house, not much to the house, love and love experience in each hand house. The Number 12 was in the little town, looking across the hill from it was Number 13, a white house, not very big and simple. They were called and were very a little and were important, the little house, not much to the house.

reduced and they had recently been forced to move northward, where the social atmosphere was a little less refined perhaps, but where rents were very much lower. The old ladies were "characters," and no retirement a mere distance of thirty blocks or so could make their friends forget them. The old ladies were at home nearly every afternoon and nearly every afternoon they served tea to one or more callers.

These old ladies were the Misses Mary and Sarah Nash, and on a certain day they poured tea for a visitor who was much younger than themselves and who had come there for the first time.

"You have a perfectly wonderful apartment, have n't you?" she said.

"It is very comfortable," Miss Mary answered. "It's bright and airy, we're really very comfortable indeed."

"Much more comfortable than we could possibly be downtown," Miss Sarah said. "We could hardly find even two rooms downtown, and dark ones at that, for what we pay here."

"And the neighborhood is most attractive, too, is n't it?" The visitor guessed that; she was not familiar with it and had hardly noticed the surroundings as she came in.

"Quite," said Miss Sarah. "It seems to be entirely respectable and there is no more noise than would naturally be expected. The street cars bothered us a little at first, but we have become quite used to them, and then you know we are on the fifth floor and very little noise reaches us."

"And the people in the house are very well behaved," Miss Mary said. "We were naturally afraid of having noisy, pounding children overhead, or music of one kind or another, but except for a phonograph which we hear occasionally there has n't been a sound."

"I don't suppose you know any one in the house?" the visitor asked.

"No, we don't. We say good morning in the hall or on the elevator and speak of the weather. They appear to be very nice people, but uninteresting."

"Except one," said Miss Sarah.

"Sarah!" The word was an exclamation denoting surprise, chagrin, and shame.

Miss Sarah laughed. She knew perfectly well that her sister's surprise, chagrin, and shame were assumed entirely for the benefit of the occasion. Her sister was quite willing to discuss the matter in any reasonable circumstances.

"Why is one not uninteresting?" the visitor asked.

"I did not say that she was interesting,—not personally, at least," Miss Sarah explained. "She lives next door, in Number Fourteen."

"You should see her, my dear," Miss Mary said, apparently resigned to seeing the thing through. "Of her type she is exceedingly good-looking and she dresses extremely well; she has the knack."

The visitor smiled. "What type is she?" she asked.

"We suspect her," whispered Miss Sarah.

"And we've seen the man," whispered Miss Mary. "He's tall, square-shouldered, square-jawed, a big man; and he looks like a gentleman. As to her—well—it's perfectly plain what she is."

"As a matter of fact, we can't be absolutely sure," said Miss Sarah.

"Fiddlesticks! As a matter of fact, we are absolutely sure," Miss Mary stated. "And furthermore it's disgraceful and ought not to be permitted; it ought to be stopped. This is supposed to be a respectable family apartment."

"But it is thrilling. I've never been so close to—"

"Sarah!"

They discussed the thrilling details to some further extent. The old ladies enjoyed a bit of scandal and the visitor enjoyed it no less than her hostesses.

Finally the visitor said that she really must go. The elderly spinsters went to the door with her and she stood by it for a moment, saying a last word. The door was open and she was standing so that she could see into the corridor; the spinsters could not see into it. The elevator door opened, the visitor said good-by, and stepped into the corridor, shutting the door behind her.

Ben was standing in front of the door of apartment Number 14, waiting for it to open. He saw the visitor from Number 15, but he saw little more than that a woman was taking the elevator. The corridor was not brightly lighted, the visitor wore a thin veil for motoring, and his thoughts were elsewhere. But Jean Vance recognized Ben and the description of Thrall which the spinsters had given her fitted Ben exactly, though the two men looked nothing alike. As she entered the elevator and went downward her lips curled into a smile, a most unpleasant smile.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOPE'S automobile accident happened early in May. Ben called on Lizzie Meadows late in May. Dr. Slade called upon Hope early in June and told her that Ben was not ill, that the bump on his head had been a bump and nothing more, and he told her that she was, to all intents and purposes, entirely well, and no further prescription was needed beyond that of common-sense conduct.

Within a week Hope felt perfectly well, she had not an ache or pain and her strength had returned completely. Common-sense conduct had become normal conduct very quickly.

"So much for youth and a real constitution," thought Hope.

Then, having settled all matters pertaining to her physical condition, she sighed and then sat on the edge of her bed, pensive. She wiggled her lower jaw about, which is a common sign that the owner of the jaw is thinking; she bit her lip, which is a similar sign. She had been doing both for a week, over and over again, when she was alone. Hope had a problem on her hands, a very considerable problem. The fundamental question had been in the back of her head for years and years and had received a great deal of attention, but it had been, during those years and years, a question that she did not have to answer. Recently, quite recently, the

question had turned itself into the problem, and so far as Hope could see all the evidence pointed to the fact that it was her own special problem to solve.

She had turned it and twisted it over and over in her mind, she had considered it from every possible angle, and finally, with some reluctance, she had made the decision that there was only one thing for her to do. That settled, finally and definitely, there remained only to determine how best to carry out her resolution, and to scrape up courage enough to do it.

Luck was with her. One night, just before she went to bed, she sat wiggling her jaw and biting her lips; the next day, at four in the afternoon, she was walking along Orchard Street, which was nearly deserted, when Ben passed her and in passing saw her and drove to the curb and stopped.

He asked her where she was going and whether he could take her there.

"How's business?" Hope asked.

"Rotten," Ben said. "Everybody's well, except hospital stuff."

"All through for the day? Because if you are—"

"I am," Ben said. "Want to take a ride out in the country?"

"I will if you'll come back to dinner. I'm the only one home except Father and Mother and they're going out somewhere after dinner, I *think*."

"May I go round to the office first?" Ben asked. "Just to leave word where I am."

"Yes, if you're sure there won't be a message that will spoil everything."

Ben was sure there would not be and there was not. He took time to array himself in clean linen.

Their drive was uneventful. They drove slowly and they talked little,—a word now and then on something

that caught their eyes, a remark on some unimportant subject.

Ben was happy. The day was warm but not too warm, the country was abloom, his car was running beautifully, and the girl beside him was as she had always been. Once upon a time he had been frightened badly, but since the night of the accident, when he had seen Hope at Austen's, he had known that everything was all right. When he was sure of that his mind had cleared up and he was able to look at things calmly and see them clearly.

Carefully analyzed, the whole blessed business came down to what had happened in a fraction of a second. He had told Hope that Mrs. Bailey's boy was going to get well and Hope had looked at him with tears in her eyes and a tiny smile on her lips, and a queer expression on her face generally. He had been fool enough to misinterpret that expression, he had thought that Hope cared for him in a way that was all wrong. He had never gone so far as to think that Hope loved him,—no, he had never done that,—but he had believed that some entirely new and much to be regretted sentiment for him had crept into her mind, or perhaps even into her heart.

The absurdity of it had been entirely apparent soon afterward; the certainty of the absurdity had been determined on that evening at Austen's. He had simply been a damned fool, and that was the worst of it and a great relief. Of course the accident had been a very serious affair, he was to blame for it to some extent, and for his carelessness to have resulted in serious injury to Hope would have been a terrible thing. But as soon as he had been sure that Hope was not badly hurt, that all possibility of internal injury was past, there was nothing for it but to be thankful that she'd gotten out of it so lightly; it might easily have been very much worse.

They reached the Lees' house at half-past six. Ben

talked medicine to Dr. Lee until dinner-time, Mrs. Lee embroidered and talked to Hope. Hope had remembered correctly, her father and mother *were* going out after dinner and in due course out they went. So it was that luck was with Hope. She was alone with Ben in the big upstairs sitting-room and there was n't a chance of having any one walk in on them.

Luck was further with Hope, in a minor way. There was still almost daylight enough to read by, and when her father and mother were gone she sat down by a window, with the evening paper. Ben was smoking in front of her, at another window.

"It won't do your eyes any good to read in that light, young lady," Ben said.

"Don't talk shop, Ben," Hope answered, and Ben chuckled. "I'm just looking at the head-lines." There was a moment's silence while Hope perused the head-lines. She turned a page and in a moment put down the paper. "I see the James B. McGowans have announced the engagement of their daughter Helène to Frederick Anthony Crosby," she said, with mock impressiveness. "I'm glad I'm not Freddy."

"I'm glad I'm not Helène," Ben said.

"Is he very bad?"

Ben nodded slowly. "He has n't an idea in his head and he's been badly brought up."

"She's a perfect little fool, and she's only seventeen or eighteen. I suppose both sides think they're clever; one gets money and the other gets a name. I suppose we'll be treated to all the details by the papers."

"And a couple of years from now we'll probably get a lot more details," Ben suggested. "Their kind is never satisfied with anything very long."

"He must be thirty, is n't he?" Hope asked.

"Pretty nearly, I guess."

Then Hope laughed—a low, silvery little laugh—at Ben. “Why don’t you get married?” she asked. It was perfectly evident that she was teasing him.

“Can you imagine me married?” Ben said.

“Why not?” Hope drew the words out into an astonished exclamation.

“Do you think I’m the marrying sort?”

“Every man is the marrying sort, every man ought to be married. It’s his duty; and, besides, that’s the only way he can be really happy.”

“How happy do you think Crosby is going to be?”

“I’m talking about men, m-e-n, men, not chumps. Look at Father and Austen, and compare them with Francis—and you. I’m serious, Ben, you really ought to get married; all doctors should.”

Hope’s voice could not have been lighter or more cheerful; she was teasing Ben, there could not be any doubt in the world of that. She had teased him before, often, and he was used to it and enjoyed it. She had never teased him before on this subject, but that did n’t make any difference.

“Who on earth would marry me?” he asked. He really could not think of a woman who would.

“I would, for one, I’d be delighted to.” Still Hope was laughing at him merrily, but that was the last of their merriment that evening. Ben’s peace of mind was destroyed in a flash. The sudden, inexplicable fear that had swept over him at Mrs. Bailey’s swept over him again. A thousand doubts assailed him, his brain whirled, the room danced before his eyes in the dusk, around and around Hope.

She was lying back in her chair, her hands lay motionless in her lap, her head was bent forward, she was gazing at him from under her lids. There was a tiny smile on her lips and there was a sparkle in her eyes; even in

the dim light he could see them as he had seen them at Mrs. Bailey's.

He made a desperate, courageous attempt to laugh, but the result was more like a stifled cry than a laugh.

"Be calm, Ben." Hope herself was very calm. "Of course I ought not to tease you, but—but—I'm not really teasing you, I'm very serious."

"Hope, Hope, please!" Ben muttered. He did not know what to do or what to say.

"There's nothing to get the least excited about," Hope said. "You ought to get married, there's no question about that. You do admit that much, don't you? You do; that's settled, so—"

"No, it is n't settled, Hope." Ben was clutching at a straw. He had no power to assert himself; he was afraid, terribly afraid for Hope, and his fear made him weak.

"Fiddlesticks! That's utter nonsense, and as long as you must marry, why not marry me? I'm awfully fond of you, Ben, I really am, and you know so little about women, except as flesh-and-bone mechanical contrivances, some terrible creature would probably get you if I did n't. It always happens that way with women-haters, they get the very worst possible ones in the end. You and I'd get along beautifully, Ben, and I'm not a horrible creature, I'm really a very lady-like young woman and I have a sweet disposition and enough intellect to get along with and I'm strong and healthy. What more can you ask?"

Ben knew that the terrible thing had happened. Hope loved him. And he knew the awful tragedy of her love. She laughed and she spoke lightly, but tragedy lay waiting for her. She was young, she did not understand. She was asking him to marry her and she did not know what she asked, she did not know that it was impossible

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She heard the front door close and heard Austen call

for him to marry her. It was remarkable, very remarkable that she should ask him to marry her,—that she, young and sweet and modest and innocent, should ask him, or any man, to marry her. Girls like her did not ask men to marry them. It was very curious that she should have done so.

But it was done. He was facing the fact, and he must, so far as the power lay within him, make her see how impossible it was that they should marry. And somehow or other he must make her understand so that she would not be hurt, so that she would not suffer, so that her love would pass away from her, leaving in its place only their old friendship. How could he do that? Hope loved him,—he was sure of that,—and when a good woman loves, her love becomes so great a part of her that it is nearly all of her; she does not love easily and she cannot put off her love easily. Hope had confessed her love and her love must be very great indeed if she were willing to tell him of it, to ask him to marry her; it must be very great indeed when she was willing to cast aside the convention of ages that woman must be wooed.

She was very precious and he must not hurt her, he must save her from unhappiness, so far as he was able. But how could he save her? What could he do or say? He did not know. He was face to face with a terrible problem.

He rose, slowly, and looked down at her. She was smiling and her eyes sparkled. He turned from her to the window and stood there, trying to think how he could save her from anguish.

She sprang to her feet and went quickly across the floor and turned the electric-light switch, flooding the room with light. She came toward him.

"Look at me," she commanded.

Ben turned and looked at her and she laughed at him.

"Good Heavens, what an expression!" she cried. "You don't have to marry me if you don't want to, you know."

"Don't you understand, Hope, that I cannot marry you?"

"Why not? You're not married already or anything like that, are you?"

"Do you know who I am?"

She nodded her head and said, "Um-m-umph."

"But you don't, nobody does."

"I know you; that's enough."

"No, it is not enough. You know where I came from, what I was before I was twelve, the sort of people I lived with, what my mother was. You know that the only name I have was given to me, when I was twelve, by a man who took pity on me."

"Yes, I know all about that, but what difference does it make? I know you and that's all that counts."

"That cannot be all that counts. It is impossible that you, the daughter of generations of good people, should marry me, who came from the dregs even of the slums I lived in. I may not be at all what I seem to you; you must consider the blood that is in me."

Hope did not flinch, her eyes never wavered from his. The laughter was gone from her eyes and her voice.

"I've wondered sometimes if that was it," she said, "if that was why you did not ask me to marry you. I did not think that that could be it, but I could not think of any other reason. You are thinking not of you and me but of those who would follow us; is that so, Ben?"

"Yes, that is so."

"I will take that chance, if you are willing. If you are not willing, then none shall follow us."

Ben was on sure ground at last and spoke quickly. "It is not right that you should even think of such a sacrifice. You are young, very young; you will understand

when you are older. Some day you will thank me because I saved you from doing what—what you want to do now.”

“No, Ben, my dreams began years ago, years and years ago, and I have dreamed ever since. I love you, I have never loved any one else, and I never shall. Of course I would never have told you that, I would never have said anything that I have said to-night, if I did not know that you loved me, too. Don’t you think that you might tell me that you love me so that we can talk things over sensibly?”

“How do you know that I love you?”

That foolish question was Ben’s last expiring struggle against the truth which he had denied so long. What difference did it make how Hope knew that he loved her, if it were so?

“Oh, Ben, how could I help knowing it! I’ve waited and waited for you to tell me so, and finally I decided that there must be some foolish reason why you did n’t. It is so, is n’t it?”

“No, Hope, it is not so and it is impossible that you should love me.”

But, even while he told Hope that he did not love her, he confessed to himself that he did. He made the confession which he had sworn he would never make, even while in the same breath he refused paradoxically to admit that there was anything to confess. His love had been buried deep in him, hidden beneath his resolutions, a love disavowed, disowned, denounced. But he knew now that it was there, that it had been there for a long time.

He lied to Hope because he believed that she should not love him, because he believed that unless he lied he could not save her. Whether the lie could save her, or help to save her, he did not know, but he knew that, come

what might, he must deny his love for her, he must refuse to admit that she loved him.

Hope smiled at his lie as a mother smiles at an imaginative tale her child tells her. "It is n't playing fair for you to say that, Ben," she said. "I have told you that I love you, and it was n't a bit easy to do that. It's not generally considered the thing for modest maidens to do; they are supposed to sit round meekly and wait for the man to say he loves them, and even when that happens they are expected to be surprised and wait a proper length of time before saying 'yes.' But I could n't do that, Ben; I knew I loved you and I knew you loved me, and I knew that something prevented your telling me so. I knew that it could not be a serious thing, really, but that you just imagined it to be serious. I knew that there could be no real reason because I knew you, so I told you—what I've told you to-night. And you're doing what modest, innocent little girls are supposed to do; you're saying you never thought of such a thing, and that's silly. I know you love me, and all the fibs in the world can't make me believe you don't."

Poor Ben! What could he do against such a woman, against such perfect faith, against such courage—against the truth?

They were close together, beside the center-table, on which was the lighted lamp. Ben faced, there, the beautiful smiling girl—and the crisis. He was no coward. Years before, in the freight yard at Spuyten Duyvil, when he was twelve, he had, with a rock in one hand and a bolt in the other, faced a grown man and dared him to touch another boy, or the boy's belongings. He had fought Bannon and he had fought Forbes, and he had won because his courage had not failed when things looked blackest for him. He had faced Jane Dobson and had not been afraid of her. He had played football and

people said that there was no atom of yellow in him, and people were right. Only twice in his life had he known fear,—once had been in Mrs. Bailey's room and during the few short hours that followed, the other time had been that very night, when Hope had asked him to marry her.

Gradually his courage had come back to him until, as he faced Hope beside the table, he was not afraid. His brain had cleared, he had become calm, he saw his duty plain before him and he set about performing it.

"You must let me talk to you, Hope," he said. "You must let me explain everything to you." He moved a chair for her and sat down facing her. "I am going to begin at the beginning. You know where I came from, but perhaps you do not know the sort of people I came from. I never loved my mother, I hated her from the bottom of my heart. She said she was my mother and I am sure she was, it must have been so, though there was another woman who she said was her mother and that I believe was not so. That woman died, from drink, screaming and damning God. My mother was a low, vile woman; she was a large woman and naturally strong, but her strength was gone, she lived a horrible life in horrible surroundings. She was taken by the police when I was about eleven and I never saw her again; later she told John Thorpe, who had adopted me, that she did not know who my father was, and she probably told the truth. But knowing what she was, the life she led, and the men she knew, it is not hard to imagine what sort of man he was.

"I hated women when I was a boy, I had reason to. All women, good and bad, treated me as though I were a cur, an outcast, and I was. That hatred grew. My adopted mother hated me, we were never friends; I hated her, and I hated my teachers and they hated me. It has

been so ever since, why I do not know, but it is so. I am a fool, the fault is mine, but it was born in me. In all my life I have known only four women whom I liked,—Mrs. Williams in Brookline, your mother, Elinor, and you, and I have liked them as I like men, as I like Austen. I have never loved a woman and I think that I never shall. I am thirty-four, and if I were ever going to love I should have done so before this.

“You are only twenty-four and almost all of your life is before you, and you must not ruin that life. You would do so if you were to marry me. Your place in the world is secure, it has come to you through generations of fine people. I have no place, no people, even my name is mine only because the law gave it to me. When you marry you must marry such a man as you are a woman; to do otherwise would mean a life of unhappiness for you. Nature and wise society invented love and marriage; they began, in some form or other, when the world began, and civilization has perfected them, for a purpose, and neither you nor any one else can deny that purpose.

“If you were to take my name you would have no name at all; if you married me, thinking that would be all sufficient for your happiness, you would discover very soon that you had made a terrible mistake. Some women can deny themselves marriage, some apparently have no desire to be married. It is a new condition and may be a permanent one, I don’t know. But no woman can marry and be happy if she contracts only the form of marriage; the world would be a poor place to live in if that were not so. If you married me it must be such a marriage, for it would not be fair to those who followed us to—”

“Call them children, Ben,” Hope said, “it makes it so much easier.”

“As you will. It would not be fair for us to bring

children into the world only to say to them, 'We have taken a chance that your minds and bodies will be strong and healthy, that your constitutions will be sound, that you will have a fair chance in the world.' Even if they seemed to be perfect mentally and physically we should have to say: 'You are the children of a man of whom you know nothing and can never know anything. Your father is an outcast in society, whatever his place in the world may be; by a miracle he has escaped the curse that is surely in his blood and you have escaped it, but it may appear in your children.'

"With some women, Hope, I might take that chance, with some woman of low degree if I loved her. Perhaps if I loved such a woman I might be selfish enough to take that chance, and laugh if things went wrong. It might be her fault as much as mine; what could she expect?—the world is full of children who have never had a chance. But I cannot take that chance with you, Hope; your life must be ordered better than that. Perhaps it is because I cannot take that chance with such a woman as you that I have never loved; perhaps, unknowingly, I have never let myself think of love. To me to love means to marry and marriage means children, and I am so selfish that I would not have children unless I were sure of their father and their mother, and I can never be sure of myself.

"Do you understand, now, why you must deceive yourself,—know that your dreams are unreal and unstable, that you really do not love me, but that what you think is love is only a little simple affection, mixed with kindness and charity?"

"You like children, don't you, Ben?" Hope seemed quite undisturbed.

"Yes."

"You would like to have children of your own, would n't you?"

"Yes." Ben's voice was a whisper.

"And this heredity business is the only trouble?"

"Yes, so far as I am concerned." He hesitated. "But not so far as a woman like you is concerned." For a moment a lighter note crept into his voice. "I'd be a terrible man for a woman to live with."

"Because you don't like women and society and all that sort of thing? You mean that your wife would be living with a bear in a cage?"

"Yes, something like that."

"But that is n't really important, is it? If everything else were all right and you loved a good woman and she loved you, you'd take a chance on that part of it, would n't you?"

"I suppose I'm selfish enough to do that."

"Then it seems to me that everything is perfectly simple. Suppose we were to leave it to Father and Mother. Father knows as much about such things as you do, and they both love me. If I were to ask them for their advice, would n't it be safe to take it? They would not let me do anything wrong."

Ben started to speak, he did utter some indistinct words, but Hope held up her hand to stop him and, further, interrupted him. "Now, don't tell me you don't love me and that I don't love you. That's all perfect nonsense. I know you love me, and I'm not the only one who knows it, either. Never mind who else knows it. What's more, I think all this third-and-fourth-generation business is perfect nonsense, too. But I'll be a sport. I'll leave it to Father and Mother and if they don't say it's all right, absolutely all right beyond any question whatever, without equivocation, without reservation, hesitation or qualification, I'll go into a convent and you can

—can—I don't know what you can do, it does n't make any difference. That 's fair, is n't it?"

It *was* fair and Ben almost succumbed to the temptation then and there. If Hope's father and mother approved of her marrying him, could he not accept their approval without question? Would that not relieve him of all responsibility? Could he not marry Hope with his conscience clear? Dr. Lee would not pass over lightly the question of heredity, and his judgment would be sound. Was not his fear a child of his own imagination? Were not his own body and mind proof of his worthiness and proof of the safety of his children?

But knowledge and resignation had been in him too long to be put quickly aside; they were part of his being, the very fiber of him, and he sat silent, considering what answer he should make to Hope. He did not have to answer her, for she broke in upon his meditations.

"It is n't fair of me to put it that way, Ben," she said. "I told Mother that you were going to ask me to marry you, that I was sure of it. I did n't dare tell her that if you did n't ask me that I was going to ask you. I asked her if she and Father would be glad to have me marry you, that of course I was a very dutiful and respectful daughter and very young, and all that nonsense, and that I would n't do anything that they did n't approve of, absolutely. Mother talked it over with Father and they not only gave me their unqualified consent but told me that if I could catch you I'd be an awfully lucky girl. And there you are. It's been a terrible evening for you, Ben, I know, and you've been a perfect saint. I know it's been a terrible strain, having me act this way, but it's going to come out all right. Run along now and think it over, sleep on it, and then some day come and tell me you love me and that all's well."

She laughed at him and was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

BEN, standing in the Lees' library, saw rope go through the door and saw her white skirt fade in the darkness of the hall. He stood by the table for a moment, looking down at it, overwhelmed by the words she had spoken to him. There swept over him a sensation of exultation in the belief that all was well with him, but there followed quickly the knowledge that facts were facts and that no words could change them. Hope's father and mother had spoken and they could do no wrong where their child was concerned, and yet he could not throw off an atom of the resolution he had made and had kept so long.

He walked slowly from the room and out of the house to his car. He drove away, facing the future as he had never been forced to face it before. Now he was concerned not only with his own life but with Hope's, which was far more important than his own could ever be. Her life had been placed in his hands, to do with as he would. He must decide for himself and for Hope, and he must decide quickly where right and honor lay.

He came to his house and left his car at the curb; he went indoors believing that he must face hours, perhaps days of torture until his decision was made. Once it was made, there would be no going back. He wondered whether he would be able to sleep. He wondered whether he should attempt to sleep or whether he should remain awake to wrestle with his problem; he wondered whether

he should not sleep so as to prepare himself to think clearly, honestly, unselfishly.

The decision as to sleep, at once, was made for him. As he opened the door he heard the telephone ringing and went to it and answered it. He heard a woman's voice.

"Doctor Thorpe?"

"Yes."

"This is Milly Cassidy. Can you come round here right away?"

"Yes. What's the trouble?"

"Bessie. She looks damn bad to me and I ain't crazy about havin' anybody I don't know in here just at the minute. Get me?"

"Yes, I get you. Who's Bessie, one of your girls?"

"No, she's an old-timer, been doin' general housework here for I don't know how long."

It was after one o'clock when Ben went out into the night again. The little car which he left standing day and night at his door took up its burden again and carried him beyond the edge of Alden's respectability, to Milly Cassidy's. Ben had run across Milly in the hospital when something had gone wrong with her that required an operation. She had had a long siege and during it had taken a fancy to Ben. There was no sentiment about Milly, sentiment had been knocked out of her years before; she looked on life as a thing hardly worth while, but as long as it had to be lived, there was nothing to do but make the best of it. She had to live and she lived the only way she knew how. She was frank with Ben, and the fact that he did not remonstrate with her, or treat her with any lack of respect or show by his speech that she was not as other women were, had much to do with her fancy for him. A little later she had sent for him, for Sadie, who was very young and who came near being beautiful. She was a slip of a thing with

little strength to begin with and not much of that left. Ben had done what he could for her, which had been little. But Milly Cassidy knew a square man when she saw him.

Ben was sorry for her, and Sadie; they lived in a house where tragedy stalked unrestrained. There was no use trying any reform business, the world was the world and those things had to be if history meant anything. There was nothing for him to do but to stave off individual tragedies when and where he could.

The house was dark, but as he went up the steps the door opened and Millicent Cassidy let him in. There was a gas-jet, turned low, in the hall; every door was closed, there was not a sound. Milly led him upstairs to the top floor, where Bessie lay on her bed. She was a very old woman, seventy would be a moderate guess; her hair, what was left of it, was a dirty white, her skin wrinkled beyond belief, her teeth yellow, her lips drawn and bluish. Her eyes were closed and she seemed hardly to be breathing.

Ben made a quick examination. "How long has she been like this?" he asked.

"I don't know. She said she was n't feelin' very good this afternoon and came up here. We forgot about her till she did n't come down for her supper; we have supper sort of late here. She works from two in the afternoon till about now. I found her this way and telephoned you. Is she bad?"

"She's through. She may go any minute, or she may last twenty-four hours, not longer than that."

"Christ! She can't die here."

"All right, Milly. Where's the telephone?"

He telephoned for an ambulance and they waited. The girl was not over thirty and it was her house. It was

not a pleasant night for her. She was thinking hard and she was very unhappy.

"A thing like that gets yer, Doc. She ain't much over fifty—fifty-five maybe—and she's been scrubbin' for twenty years, she told me so herself. She gets the jim-jams every once in a while and talks wild. Sometimes she talks like a lady, too; she says she was a lady once. I guess she was."

"What's her name?"

"I don't know. Bessie's all we know."

"Has she any people?"

"Search me. I never heard her speak of any. Makes yer think, don't it?"

Ben shrugged his shoulders. "It's an old story, Milly."

"I wish ter hell the men were all like you, Doc; things might be different. Sadie's gone. No, I don't know where she is; she could n't stay here, I'm not runnin' a charitable institution. She was a sweet girl, though. I guess she's dead by this time."

The ambulance came, Bessie was carried downstairs and taken away, and Ben followed her on her last ride.

When he reached the hospital Ben explained, to the hospital records, about the dying woman, so that Milly Cassidy would have no questions to answer. Then he went to Bessie, who was still unconscious, and examined her more carefully than he had done before. There was nothing to do. He left her and, such things being all in the day's work, forgot her.

An interne asked him to go into one of the wards for a moment and he stayed there half an hour. As he came out another interne met him.

"The old woman you brought in is conscious," he said, "and is calling for you, at least it sounds that way; she's saying your name over and over, or something like it. Do you want to see her? She's likely to go any minute."

"I never saw her before. I don't even know who she is."

Ben went into the room, where screens were around the woman's bed.

Her eyes were open and she was speaking, mumbling what seemed to be the same word over and over again. She saw Ben standing over her and she looked at him as though he interested her, but her mind was too far gone to maintain any train of thought. She raised her claw-like hand toward him, slowly, as though reaching for him, but it fell back and she closed her eyes. Her lips kept up their constant mumbling and Ben understood why the interne had said that she was saying his name or something like it, over and over. The word was as much like "Ben" as anything. He listened, but he could make nothing of it. She stopped her mumbling, but her lips moved silently, not in an attempt to form words but as if from habit, a peculiar drooping on the left side with a corresponding movement of the cheek. Ben saw it and suddenly there flashed across his mind the belief that he had seen that unusual contortion of feature before, long years before. He turned the shaded lamp at the bedside so that it shone directly on the woman; he gazed at her, trying to discover what had made the movement of her lips and cheek stir up some old memory within him. He could not do so, and dimmed the light again.

He spoke to the interne, telling him to give the woman a hypodermic, and left.

An hour later, Bessie—just Bessie, nothing more—cried quits with the world.

Ben, leaving the hospital, drove to his house again. It was long after midnight. This time there was no question, it was time to sleep. He was very tired. He went to bed and lay there for an hour before sleep came, an hour which accomplished nothing.

Ben took a train northward on Tuesday night. The determination came to him while he was operating on a child at the hospital. The truth flashed over him that he was thinking not of the child on the table before him but of himself and Hope. To operate properly under such conditions was impossible, to attempt to do so was very close to criminal. There was only one thing for him to do,—go away. He could not remain in Alden and do his work until his problem was solved, finally and forever. Then it was that he thought of Hackett, the teacher who in Ben's youth had been his friend, his guide, and inspiration.

He would go to Cambridge and see Hackett. He smiled when he thought of asking a professor of mathematics to answer for him a question based on ethics and on whatever laws of heredity there might be. But the absolute faith which he had had in his old teacher had never waned; years before he had set him on a pedestal and had kept him on it always.

"Besides," he thought, "I can see old Whartenby and see what he says about it." Whartenby had been to Ben in the medical school what Hackett had been in earlier days. Whartenby was a scientist, but Whartenby's opinions on medical matters were always tempered with sound, everyday good sense. Ben could trust him first to be honest and then to distinguish between high-flown theory and common sense, which was exactly what Ben wanted. Later on he laughed at himself for having gone to Hackett and Whartenby for advice on a matter which he was much better able to decide for himself, and which in the end he must decide for himself.

But go to them he did, and even as he went he said to himself that he was in no condition to look upon his problem calmly and sanely; those two men could at least advise him without being influenced by their own desires

and their own interests. He was too close to the problem to see clearly.

He went to Whartenby first, both because Whartenby was nearer the station and because Whartenby would tell him what he had to fear from heredity. If Whartenby gave him a clean bill, then he could ask Hackett the ethical question.

Ben dropped in on Whartenby and was received with open arms. Whartenby rushed into a technical discussion in no way related to Ben's mission and Ben followed, with the result that Ben talked to Whartenby's class and attended a clinic. It was not until lunch that Ben had the chance to put his question to Whartenby. Boiled down, his question was this:

"You know my origin,—the slums. You know that my mother, all I know of her, was a drunken prostitute; that I never knew my father, who he was or anything about him. So far as I'm concerned I came out of the mess fortunately, but is it right, is it safe, is it honorable for me to marry? Is it fair to the girl—and the next generation?"

Whartenby answered, "If I had a daughter I would give her to you without a question and consider her an extremely fortunate woman."

Ben went to Hackett at Cambridge and late in the afternoon he put his question to him. Hackett listened until Ben had told him the whole story. Then he said:

"Neither I nor any one else knows who you are, or probably ever will know, but one thing I'm sure of—you lived in the slums, but you were not born there. During your last years with her your mother had sunk low, but she had not always been what she was then. Your father, John Thorpe, saw her and, poor creature that she was, he told me that he was sure she had not always been so, that her mind had gone and that there was tragedy in her

eyes, that he believed her mind had gone before she fell. Of course he was not sure, no one ever can be sure, or know who or what your mother was when you were born. But it is not necessary for you to know. When your father brought you to me you seemed to be what you believed yourself to be. Within a year you had lost all trace of your old environment and had come into your own; blood had told, even in so short a time.

"There can be no question about you or the next generation. As to Miss Lee's marrying a man who has no family, that, it seems to me, is a question for her to settle and she seems to have settled it. You are as good a man as she is a woman. Suppose things were turned about, suppose she refused to marry you or any one because she came from she knew not where, what would you think of it then?"

From Hackett Ben went to the Williamses' in Brookline and spent the night there. The old order had changed, he no longer held the Misses Williams in his lap and discussed affairs of state with them. Instead they all sat in chairs of their own and talked not at all seriously. On Thursday afternoon he took Mrs. Williams and two of her daughters to a baseball game at Cambridge. Thursday evening he went to New London and on Friday watched the crew row. Friday night at ten o'clock he arrived in New York.

Saturday morning, by invitation, he breakfasted with Mr. Archibald Rossiter at the same club in which years before that gentleman had discovered a remarkable likeness between the photograph of Ben, the football player, and the photographs of Benjamin Lloyd Rossiter, his father.

"I have come to you because years ago you came to me," Ben said. "Then, when John Thorpe, my adopted

father, was alive I did not want to know who I really was. Now I should like to know who I am."

The old gentleman shook his head. "I cannot tell you," he said. "I have but two clues and they lead nowhere: Your name is Benjamin, that has always been your name, and you bear a most striking resemblance to my father. It is not simply a question of type; my father was of no type, he was a man of most unusual appearance, just as you are. The likeness is unmistakable, almost uncanny. But I am as sure as one can be of anything in this world that you are not my father's son. I am sure that you are not my son. There remains only one possibility: I had a younger brother, Willard; he died about five months before you were born, he was killed, shot to death instantly while he was hunting. He was a good boy, a very fine boy, a little wild perhaps, but that was all. He resembled my father no more than I do; we both resembled our mother.

"Your name, Benjamin, may be a coincidence and nothing more. You may be my brother Willard's son; I do not know. He was not married, no woman ever came to us after his death, and yet—come with me."

The elder man led the younger into a large room and to an oil-painting, gold-framed, over a mantelpiece. "That is a portrait of the first president of this club. I do not know whether a man can recognize his own features or not: to me the resemblance is very striking, and, as you well know, characteristics often disappear in the second generation only to reappear in the third."

Ben gazed at the painted face above him. "I cannot tell," he said.

"No, I suppose not. Do you by any chance dislike women extremely?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because my father hated women as the devil hates

holy water, it was his most pronounced trait. He loved my mother, all other women he detested. I exaggerate, of course, but that is close to the truth."

"I am going to be married," Ben said.

"I understand, you need say nothing more. I am sorry that there is no proof; I wish there were, so that the Rossiter blood might live. I am sure that you are a Rossiter, and I know that you are more than worthy to bear the name and uphold its traditions, far more worthy, than my generation has been."

"I hope that it is so, that I have Rossiter blood in me. I shall never know, and yet I am content. I have been very fortunate." Then he told the man who was, perhaps, his uncle, of the problem he had faced and which Dr. Lee and Whartenby and Hackett had helped him solve.

It was after twelve o'clock when Ben took the train to Alden. He had telegraphed Hope that he would be at her house at half-past four, an extremely laconic message.

Before he left Alden he had telephoned to her. He had not had courage to go to her; he had been afraid of what he might do or say, and he must do nothing and say nothing until he was ready to say the final word. He had gone out of Hope's house looking forward to days of struggle, even of torture, for he had been afraid that he must decide as his judgment and his conscience had dictated for so long, against himself and against Hope.

When he telephoned to Hope he had said: "I am going to Boston at once. I don't know how long I shall be away—two or three days. I must go."

"Mother wants me to go to Atlantic City with her to see some old friends who are there from the West. I think I'll go. We'll be back Saturday morning."

"I should be back by Saturday."

"Will you come to dinner Saturday night?"

"I'll send you word. Of course I will if I can."

"Be a good boy while you're away from my care and influence."

"I'll try."

A most non-committal conversation, that, on the face of it, and yet when Hope hung up the receiver and turned away she was smiling, she was blushing and her eyes were sparkling. "He's just a silly boy," she thought. "I'd know he loved me, just from his voice then, if I'd never known it before. And all those highfalutin theories of his are going to get knocked higher than a kite for him, if he does n't do it all by himself."

She went to Atlantic City with her mother, and Mrs. Lee knew very well what was the matter with her nervous, absent-minded, and very sweet daughter. They returned to Alden on Saturday morning. Ben's telegram came just before lunch.

"To Hope, to Hope, to Hope." The words sang to him as he walked to the railway station, and on the train. A sensation of exquisite joy swept over him and remained; it was a sensation new since he had left Hackett three days before, a sensation the like of which he had never before experienced in the least degree. He had dreamed of sons; now he forgot sons and dreamed of the woman who was waiting for him.

He had, until a few short days before, believed that Hope must marry a man whose place in the world was sure; he had told her so and had not known his own unselfishness. Now he knew that for Hope to marry another man would break his heart; he knew, now, that it always would have been so. The love that he had kept dammed up within him, unacknowledged for so long, had burst its bonds and he was happy, as he had never known happiness could exist.


He was going to Hope and Hope was waiting for him. He loved her, she had confessed her love for him. He had loved her for years and years; he had not known that, but she had known it.

He was going to her—and he did not think even once of the sons who were to be his, the sons of whom once upon a time he had dreamed, sons who had made woman only a means to an end.

Ben arrived at the Lees' at half-past four. A maid opened the door for him and said that no one was at home. Mrs. Lee had gone out in the car and would be home about six; Miss Lee had gone out in her own car after lunch, alone so far as the maid knew, and had not said when she would return. Perhaps Dr. Thorpe would wait.

Dr. Thorpe would wait, and he went into the library and sat down. It was evident that the room had been prepared for the exodus of the Lees to Millhampton; it was bare of many of its usual ornaments, covers had been put on the furniture, some of the pictures were covered, there were only a few stray books and magazines on the table instead of the piles that had been on it.

Ben sat down, to wait, and he sat and waited for five minutes, doing nothing. Then he rose and walked to the window and looked up and down the street. It was a quarter of five; he wondered why Hope was not there. Perhaps she had not received his telegram. He recalled the time at which he had sent it and calculated the time at which it should have been delivered. In the ordinary course of events Hope should have received it during lunch: the Lees had lunch at half-past one. He thought of asking the maid whether or not a telegram had come for Miss Lee and he went out into the hall, but she was not in sight. He came back to the library and sat down by the window again. It was ten minutes of five.



He put his hands over his head and grasped the high back of the chair; his fingers closed over two large smooth rings which he knew were part of Hope's knitting-bag. He wondered what Hope was making, now; she was always knitting something or other for somebody, a sweater for herself, stockings for her father or Austen, socks for Austen's children. He swung the bag from the back of the chair to his knees, where it fell open. A telegram was in the bag. He hesitated a moment and then unfolded it, looking only for the printed name of the sender to discover if it were his. It was and he read it; it was exactly as he had written it, which pleased him; not a letter was misplaced. He looked at the time of its receipt and delivery, which were written on it; he examined a lot of hieroglyphics which he did not understand; he read the printed part of the form.

He put the telegram back in the bag and remembered that he had wondered what Hope was making. There was something on the needles, half a dozen plain rows that gave him no idea what the finished product was to be. The worsted was rather heavy, it was probably a sweater; stockings were not straight, they were done in a circle, or in a triangle on three needles, he thought. He rather liked playing with the things in Hope's bag and he went exploring.

He found printed directions for making gloves, which he started to read, but it was all Greek to him and he gave it up. The next thing he found was a handkerchief, then a pair of scissors and an extra ball of wool. At the bottom of the bag he found an envelop addressed to Hope in printing by a childish hand. He thought that it was probably from Austen's Mary, the laboriously formed letters about fitted her age. That it had been written by a child he was very sure. So sure of it was he that it had contained a missive from one of her nieces

or nephews that when he found another piece of paper in the bottom of the bag and saw the same printing on it he looked to see who had signed it. It never entered his head that he might be reading a real letter to Hope, that had not been intended for the eyes of the world. Even so he had not the slightest intention of reading the letter, his curiosity carried only to the writer.

There was no name written at the end of the letter. He was surprised at that and his next action was involuntary; if no name was signed, it could not be a letter and he wondered what it was—more directions for knitting, perhaps. It suddenly flashed across him that it was none of his business what it was, but that enlightenment came an instant too late. He saw his own name staring up at him and before he could stop himself, before he had any realization of his mental process, the whole letter was before his eyes, clear and sharp. It was very short, hardly a dozen words; he did not read them one after the other, the whole message appeared at once and burned itself into his brain.

Dr. THORPE IS liviNg WITH A WOMAN IN ApartMcNt
14 AT 4000 ORCHARD STRcet.

Even in printing the words the writer had followed no system, but had mixed the style of the letters. "Curious that I should think of that," Ben muttered. He had thought it was a child's letter. It was certainly not that, but the printing was childish. Whoever had sent it had printed it so as to disguise the writing.

Why on earth had Lizzie Meadows sent such a thing to Hope? What could have been her object? Why to Hope? How did she know anything about Hope? Why should she lie so maliciously about him, to any one?

Ben struggled for an answer to those questions, tried

to fathom Lizzie's motives, and could see no light until, suddenly, he was sure that Lizzie Meadows had had nothing to do with it. He had thought of Lizzie because she was the only person, besides Thrall, who knew that he had ever been to 4000 Orchard Street. No, she was n't the only person; there was Harry, who had called himself Lizzie's husband, Harry the pathetic little black-mailer.

Ben read the words again, he examined the letters carefully, trying to find some trace of the rat in them. Somehow the letters suggested a woman, but that meant nothing; probably even a handwriting expert could not distinguish between the printing of a man and that of a woman. Harry was the one who had done it, that was the logical explanation. But why had Harry done it? What could Harry know of him, or of Hope? How could he have chosen Hope to send the letter to, knowing that it would thus accomplish the greatest possible harm? He could not know that, it was utterly impossible. Furthermore, it was not a crook's way of doing things; there was nothing in it for him as things stood. Except revenge! Possible, of course. But somehow there was something wrong with the theory that Harry had done it, it did n't ring true. Neither Lizzie nor Harry would have mentioned the apartment at 4000 Orchard Street. They would have given an indefinite address.

There was a deeper motive and a greater knowledge behind that letter than either Lizzie or Harry could have. Who could have such a motive? Who could know or even suspect his relations with Hope. Who knew that he had gone to Apartment 14, that one time, away out on Orchard Street?

Curiously enough, Ben finally remembered the woman in the hallway, and, as if she had made an impression on his subconscious self, when he remembered her at all he

remembered her distinctly. But she was not distinct enough in his memory for him to recognize her.

If she was the woman who had written that letter, she must have known him and she must have known something of Lizzie Meadows. A doctor may go anywhere. *must* go where he is needed. No woman in her senses could jump at such a conclusion as this woman had arrived at unless she knew about Lizzie Meadows. What woman did he know who could possibly know Lizzie Meadows; What woman did he know who resembled this tall, well-built, well-dressed woman? What woman could wish to do him harm?

The woman had come out of the apartment opposite Number 14. She might live there and she might not. If she did not, the people in Apartment 15 might have spoken about her. But certainly those people could not have mentioned him in connection with Lizzie Meadows; he had never been in the place before and nobody but Thrall and Gibb knew that he was going there.

In the end it all came down to a woman who knew him, who wished to do him harm, and who knew at least of his friendship with Hope, who suspected perhaps that there was more than friendship between him and Hope.

Jean Vance!

He had been a cur, and now he was to pay. He had let his egotism run away with him. Years before he had made up his mind what sort of woman she was and he had never changed that positive opinion; it would please him to have it proved that he was right. He had suspected that she had some scheme against him in her head, and he had let her have a free rein, he had aided and abetted her. In his house he had urged her on, let her lose control of herself, to satisfy his egotism; and when

she had satisfied it he had laughed at her and made a fool of her.

It had been a dirty business, a game no decent man would play, no matter how strong the temptation, no matter how crafty and selfish and insincere the woman was. He had given her her head when he knew what would come of it; he had helped her at every step, when he knew that he was leading her into a trap, into humiliation and mortification. He had done nothing to save her from herself, he had thought only of himself, and he had had his victory.

Now he was to pay. It was after five o'clock and Hope had not come. The letter had been delivered while she was in Atlantic City, she had found it that morning when she returned and had read it. She had gone out after lunch, alone, and she had not come back. She had not been able to send him word not to come, so she had done the only thing there was to do: she had gone away and would not return until her father and mother were at home. Of course she would not expect him to wait there for her.

She had gone away to consider what she should do. It would not take her long to decide that: she would tell her mother, her mother would tell her father and—the rest was very simple.

"Hope, Hope." Ben spoke her name aloud, but very low and his voice had shame in it for what he had done to Jean Vance, but the sound of Hope's name even on his own lips seemed to startle him.

"Hope, Hope." There was amazement in his voice. He rose slowly to his feet, holding the back of the chair, and as he rose, the amazement that had been in his voice came into his face and then gave way to the glow of unutterable joy. His lips, that so seldom smiled, smiled as an angel smiles; his cold, hard eyes were filled with

glistening tears, for suddenly the realization had come to him that Hope would know that the accusation was a vile lie, and nothing else. It was impossible that she should believe for a single instant that it was true.

He was standing by the window; he was looking into the street. It was an indefinite thing, the street,—a misty, unreal thing, seen and not seen. Even the car standing at the curb before the house was just a car, nothing more, one of the hundred thousand that plied their way about the city and came to rest close to curbs everywhere.

It was so for many moments, that car, one of the hundred thousand, though in reality Ben knew it well. It was so for a long time before the truth forced itself through his emotions and made itself known. Then he knew that Hope had come home. How long had the car been there? What had become of Hope?

Ben looked at his watch, it was a quarter after five. Hope had come home, believing that he would not wait so long. She had discovered that he was there and had gone upstairs. She would not see him. Again, for an instant, he believed that Jean Vance's letter had damned him in Hope's eyes forever, and then—

"No, no! She would not believe!" His voice was a whisper.

Hope was there, in the house. Why did she not come?

He turned from the window. Hope was standing in the doorway, waiting for him to turn and see her.

"I'm sorry, Ben, I ran over a whole flock of nails, far, far from a garage. I had two flat tires and only one spare. I came as soon as I could. Why did you go to Boston?"

Never had Ben been a more foreboding figure. His huge bulk was motionless, his hands were clenched tight, his head was bowed forward, a very little, his lips were set in hard lines, he gazed at Hope with cold eyes. He

loved her, he had loved her for years and years. He had been long in recognizing and admitting love, but now, as he faced the woman he loved, his love overwhelmed him. Another lover would have gone to her, across the room and, if she were willing, would have taken her in his arms, but not so Ben. He stood motionless, overpowered by his emotions. Hope had come, she was there before him. He had had faith in her, she would prove herself worthy of his faith. She had faith in him, she did not believe that vile accusation of the letter,—an accusation which he knew only too well might have been true of many men. His certainty of her, his sureness of her belief in him, seemed to exalt their love.

"Why did you go to Boston, Ben?" Hope asked the question again and her voice brought him back to earth.

"I went on business, very important business—to me."

"You went to London to see the king. Did you see a little mouse under a chair?" If Ben had but known it, Hope was agitated and nervous and had little control of her voice or of her words. The lightness of her speech was forced, the best defense she could set up.

"I went to see some old friends."

For an instant Hope understood nothing of the portent of those words. Her mind was upon one thing and Ben's friends had nothing to do with it. He had had a nonsensical obsession; the fact she remembered, the reason for it she had put aside. The important thing was that Ben should see the light of reason. When she received his telegram she believed he had seen it, that his obsession had vanished into thin air. She knew that he loved her. She had gone out into the country, driving, because she must do something until he came, she could not sit in the house and do nothing.

She heard what Ben said, and saw him waiting. She

knew that he was waiting for her to understand. She tried to understand.

"Old friends, Ben?" Then she laughed. "I know where you've been,—back to your old medical school, from which all knowledge flows. You went there to see a lot of musty old professors, did n't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"And they told you that you were just a silly boy, did n't they?"

"Yes, they did."

"And that knocked to smithereens the wonderful lecture you delivered to me last Monday night."

"Did I deliver a lecture then? I don't remember."

"Yes, you did, and I replied, rather effectively; you had n't a leg to stand on when I got through. But I never took it very seriously; I knew what lay behind it. I knew it was just talk, to evade the issue."

"I evade the issue, Hope?"

"Now, Ben! I quite understand. A big river that has been flowing serenely in one direction for years and years, ever since it was a river, can't be made to turn round and flow the other way without a struggle. Don't you think that that is a perfect illustration, or example, or whatever you call it?"

"You mean that I have been drifting along, blindly, obstinately, narrow-mindedly, egotistically?"

"That's pretty strong, but the idea is there. You silly boy! Ben, are you really scared to death of women when they are not under an anæsthetic?"

Ben shook his head slowly. "Am I? I don't think so."

"You've been scared to death of me for days and for months. You looked as though you were afraid that I was going to drop dead or shoot you or do something to mess everything up any minute. I did n't, did I? But I have messed things up for you now, have n't I? Not

ribly! It's like pulling teeth for you to admit that you actually love a mere woman, is n't it?"

Ben rose from the couch slowly and walked toward Hope, but she held up her hand.

"I don't know what you're going to do," she said, "but before it's too late would you mind putting my letter back where you got it, in my knitting-bag?"

Jean Vance's letter was in Ben's hand, it had been there ever since he had read it. He had folded it and bent in and rolled it almost into a ball.

"Oh, yes, I know you've read it, I saw you do it: I was standing in the doorway, I saw the whole business. I heard you mutter, 'Hope, Hope,' tragically two or three times. I knew you were wondering—whether I believed it. I saw you come to the conclusion that I did n't." Hope was facing him; her head was thrown back, her eyes had fire in them. "I was pleased—very much pleased. It showed that you had as much faith in me as I had in you. That letter came last Saturday morning—two days before last Monday evening, the evening I brazenly proposed marriage to you. Do you understand that—exactly?"

Ben went toward Hope slowly and spoke slowly. "Yes—I do—I do understand."

Again Hope held out her hands to stop him. Her hands went into his and held him back.

"There's one other thing you've got to understand," she said. "I don't expect everything, but if you don't make a better husband than you've made a lover I'll never forgive you. You've spoiled every dream I ever had—but one—but—oh, Ben!"

Hope was laughing at him.





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